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AFRICAN MODERN ART AND BLACK CULTURAL TRAUMA

Everlyn Nicodemus

School of Arts & Education

Middlesex University

January 2011

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PART 2

PUBLISHED WORKS SUBMITTED AND DOCUMENTATION

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A. Submitted Essays

(N.B. In the Context Statement referred to as ‘Submitted Essay No 1 etc.)

1. ‘Konst fran soder om Sahara’, (Art from South of Sahara), *Konstperspektiv* 3/92, Sweden, 1992. Co-author Kristian Romare. English rush translation from 1992. For illustrations see the pages from *Konstperspektiv*.
2. ‘Meeting Carl Einstein’, *Third Text* no 23, 1993, Africa Special Issue, 31-38.
3. ‘The Centre of Otherness’, J.Fisher (ed.) *Global Visions towards a new Internationalism in visual arts*, Kala Press 1994, 91-104.

4. 'Carrying the sun on our backs', Kanaal Art Foundation catalogue *Andrea Robbins & Max Becher*, Kortrijk, Belgium, 1994. Republished as an online monograph with the University of African Art Press, 2008.
5. 'Shift!', presented as a paper at the ACASA Tenth triennial symposium on African art, New York University, 1995, reworked and published as an online monograph with the University of African Press in 2008.
6. 'Bourdieu out of Europe?' *Third Text* no 30, 1995, 3-12. Reprinted in O.Enwezor and O.Oguibe (eds), *Reading the Contemporary. African Art from Theory to Market place*, Iniva, London, and MIT 1999, and in *Third Text Africa reframed*, Vol.1 No.2 2009.
7. 'Inside.Outside'. In catalogue *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London 1995, 29-36.
8. 'Art and Art from Africa. The Two Sides of the Gap'. *Third Text* No 33, 1995-96, 31-40, republished in *Item* no 5, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2002.
9. 'Africa, Art Criticism and the Big Commentary', *Third Text* no 41, 1997-98, Co-author Kristian Romare, 53-65.
10. 'Out of Invisibility. Problems of writing on contemporary African art', *Africa e Mediterraneo* no 2/3, Bologna, Italy 1999, English text version 80-81.
11. 'From Independence to Independence', *Independent Practices: Representation, Location and History in Contemporary Visual Art*, Bluecoat Arts Centre, Liverpool, John Moores University 2001, 14-29.
12. 'Representing African Art. A challenge by the Exhibition Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa'. Paper presented at *Symposium Africa* in Osaka, Japan, 2001, published in the report *Representing African Art and Culture*, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka 2005, 107-121.
13. 'Beware of Africanism!', *Arco contemporary art* no 33, Madrid 2004, 23-26.
14. 'The Black Atlantic and the Paradigm Shift to Modern Art in Africa'. *Critical Interventions. Journal of African art history and visual culture*, no 3-4, 2009. Aachron, California, USA.
15. 'Modernity as a Mad Dog: On Art and Trauma', in G.Mosquera & J.Fisher (eds.), *Over Here. International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, and MIT 2004.
16. 'The Work that has Begun', *Atlantica* no 43. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2006, 3-19.
17. 'History, Trauma, Visual Art'. *Arco contemporary art*, no 39 Madrid 2006, 14-18.
18. 'Guantanamo Blues. Knickers as Instruments of Torture'. *Wasafiri* no 51. Special Issue Cultures of Terror, 2007, 24-33.

19. 'The Ethics of the Wound', in Van den Braembussche et al (eds), *Art and World Views: Towards an intercultural aesthetics*, Springer Science 2008, 191-203.

B. Art Practice-based Projects

(N.B. Documenting photo copies referred to as plate 1 - 65)

1. Woman in the World

Supporting Documentation:

Catalogue from Skive with reproductions in colour and black and white and poems. Attached documentation.

Catalogues from Dar es Salaam, Calcutta and Oslo, originally produced as folded photo copies, Attached documentation.

Press cuttings from Skive, Dar es Salaam, Oslo and Calcutta

Photo copies of individual art works by Everlyn Nicodemus and from the field talks and exhibitions in Denmark, Tanzania and W. Bengal, plate 1 – 31

2. Ethics of the Wound

Supporting Documentation:

Photo copies of visual works by Everlyn Nicodemus functioning as testimonies to trauma and from the following one woman exhibitions, plate 32-65:

Crossing the Void, C.C, Strombeek, Brussels, Belgium 2004, a sixty works installation

Trauma and Art – The Hidden Scars, 198 Gallery, Brixton, London, 2006

Bystander on Probation, Women's International Arts Festival, The Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal, 2007

Symposia:

The Limits of Representation – On Trauma and Visual Art at C.C.Strombeek, Brussels 2004

Dispossession and the Poetic Imagination - Trauma and Art – The Social Realities, a symposium at Iniva, London 2006 in connection with the Brixton exhibition

Press cuttings and connected text materials

Attached documentation *Turning Pages*

Photocopies of the catalogue *La Femme* (Woman in the World I)

Photocopies of the catalogues *Woman in the World II and III* and the catalogue from the Woman in the World exhibition in Oslo

Photocopies of the catalogue *Vessels of Silence* in Kortrijk, Belgium

Film and video documentation

Woman in the World in Paintings and Poems, a documentary film 1986 for Indian television by filmmaker Balai Sen (on DVD).

Turning Pages, the artist presents Black Book 3, video (on DVD).

Beyond Depiction, a video about PTSD 2004 (on DVD).

Digital animation of the texts of the Reference Scroll on Genocide, 2006 (on dvd).

Identikitten, video on stop and search produced for workshops with youths at 198 Gallery, Brixton.2006 (on DVD).

ABSTRACT

The thesis is an inquiry into modern art in sub-Saharan Africa, its genesis and initial stages during colonial rule and the early phase of independence, and into the impact on its trajectory of a black cultural trauma mainly caused by colonial oppression.

The submitted documentation includes writings on 20th century African modernism published 1992-2009 in conjunction with two extensive, partly art practice-based projects, 'Woman in the World', 1984-86, and 'Ethics of the Wound', 2001-09

'Woman in the World' was an in-residence project carried out in Denmark, Tanzania and India, which presented an open-ended form of research built upon listening to testimonies and on interaction between oral and visual communication. In this sense it laid the ground for a more academic investigation of psychiatric literature on trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder as well as of the cultural studies literature on trauma and cultural production, which had predominantly focused on trauma symptoms in literature and film.

This research, culminating in 'Ethics of the Wound', was supported by observations derived from the author's own trauma experience as an African-born woman artist in the diaspora, facilitating an extension of interdisciplinary cultural studies to the field of visual art.

The art historical research into modern African art was initiated in 1992 with an extensive inventory of available literature in European archives and museums and followed up in 1995 with concentrated research in Nigeria and South Africa. In combination with in-depth studies of the Nigerian pioneering painter Aina Onabolu and the black South African artist Ezrom Legae it led to several insights. In the case study of Onabolu the thesis discusses in terms of a paradigm shift the crucial moment around 1900 in the changeover from pre-modern to modern art in West Africa, and in the Legae case study it presents an elaborated analysis of how, seventy years later, post-traumatic stress disorder inflicted by apartheid produced an extraordinary aesthetical tension.

By studying the emergence of modern art in sub-Saharan Africa through the perspective of cultural trauma, the thesis identifies the dual role of colonialism as the context for acquiring new ideas on art and the obstacle to African subject-forming processes fundamental to modern art production.

PART 1: CONTEXT STATEMENT

Yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity.

*But man is also a **no**. **No** to scorn of man. **No** to degradation of man. **No** to exploitation of man. **No** to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom.*

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1967.

INTRODUCTION

The connecting link between modern art and cultural trauma in Africa is the circumstance from which visual art in a modern sense emerged during colonial time. It meant a departure from a system of visual production with great traditions in the past, which had been functionally integrated in everyday life in pre-modern African societies. And subsequently it meant the generation of a new system of production and reception according to which artists were assumed to manifest their individuality and to invent-and-produce works for aesthetic consumption for an exclusive anonymous market ¹. The development would in the long run lead from a more local to a more global integration.

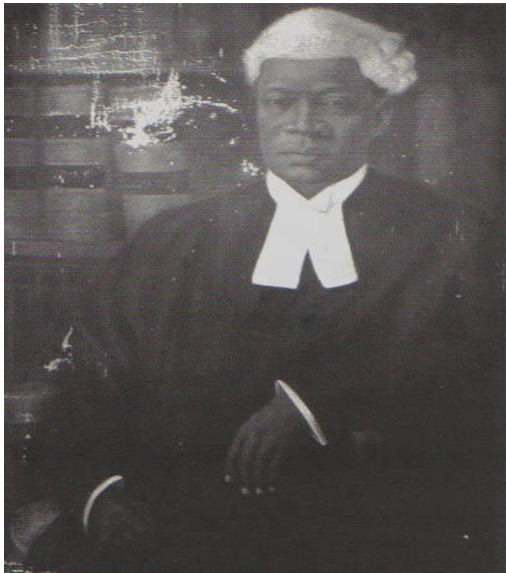


Fig.1. Aina Onabolu, *Portrait of a Lawyer*, oil on canvas, early 20th century.



Fig.2. Ezrom Legae, From *Chicken Series*, detail, drawing on paper 1977-78, South Africa National Gallery.

The shift implied the formation of a new artistic subject that challenged colonial representations/perceptions of the African as lacking intellectual independence. This

contradiction is central to the black African cultural trauma and thus to the theme of my research.

The research submitted for the doctoral degree consists of a selection of published essays on the early stages of 20th century modern art in sub-Saharan Africa, and two extensive, partly art practice based projects, *Woman in the World*, 1984-86, and *The Ethics of the Wound*, 2001-09. In these projects the artistic practice was driven by an exploring concern similar to that behind the art historical research, in *Woman in the World* being part of an agency of inquiring dialogues and communication and in *The Ethics of the Wound* as a subjective research into trauma's impact on visual production.

In the two projects studies on the experience of trauma and traumatic testimony, at the individual and collective levels, became an increasingly central issue. As it happens, the rise in trauma studies in psychiatry during the early 1980s was coincidental with the expansion of postcolonial cultural critiques, although it was only much later that an interpenetration of these disciplines occurred. Hence, a revaluation of my earlier research took place retrospectively in the light of emerging studies on trauma, which is why I have chosen the first chapter to present an account of my notion of trauma in relation to the literature on trauma.

It was with the insight obtained through these studies that the significance of the dimension of trauma and testimony to trauma became clearer, both in the development of modern art in Africa and in the founding research project *Woman in the World*, central to which were the fundamental elements of testimony: speaking and listening.

The methodology of the research has expanded and shifted as the research developed. *Woman in the World* represented a specific form of artistic research and psychological fieldwork with an almost philosophical aim: to feel a way towards an oppositional critique of the dehumanising attitude towards the 'cultural other' within the prevailing Eurocentric worldview, of which social anthropology, the discipline which I had abandoned, was but one of its academic manifestations.

The art historical research for the essays and symposium papers on modern African art during the years 1992-2009 aimed at collecting knowledge towards enabling a revision of an – at the time – prevailing anthropological model of dealing with the subject, by contrast subjecting it to the aesthetical-historical discipline of art history. At the same time my search was for support from surrounding fields such as philosophy and cultural sociology to open up an art historical practice, European as well as American and non-Western, which has often been critically narrow.

The genesis of modern art in Africa was a main concern in this research all from its beginning in the early 1990s. As I discussed in the submitted essay *The Black Atlantic and the Paradigm Shift to Modern Art in Africa*, the question where modern art began was at the time also an issue for a younger generation of West African art historians.

For my part I searched for what could be seen as representing a departure from pre-modern African traditions and constituting a first launch of a new mode of visual production. And I found those qualities in the contributions of the Nigerian painter Aina Onabolu in the early years of the 20th century.

Some Nigerian scholars disagreed. To them the transition to modern art occurred at a later stage as a turn to a mode of representation parallel to European Modernism. They consequently considered Onabolu's appropriation of a European academic mimesis to be old fashioned rather than progressive.

As I could show in the essay mentioned, there has been a turnaround about Onabolu's role. Chika Okeke's essay 'Modern African Art' in the catalogue *The Short Century* (2001)² is representative of an African scholarly view at the turn of the millennium. He gives credit to Onabolu, whom he mentions as 'the region's first modern artist', specifically for his contribution to modern artistic training. But his focus is not on the departure from the pre-modern art system but instead on the integration in African visual art of elements from western Modernism. He makes an elegant analysis of it by comparing with the process within black poetry among African and Caribbean literary modernists in Paris.

In general, art historical research has left the genesis issue, progressing to study more recent periods of African art. If we should take the teaching on African art history at the School of Oriental and African Art in London as in some sense representative, the issue of the turning to modern art has often been somewhat blurred. To professor John Picton at SOAS the transition to modernism seems to represent only one change among many changes along African art history. He stresses that '(t)he reality of the present time is that all manners of differing arts (...) are contemporary with each other.'³

Concerning the notion of paradigm shift used in the title of the essay mentioned, it is in the thesis a methodological and polemical construction applied to counter confusions. It does not refer to any periodisation but points to the historical fact that whenever a transition from traditional to modern visual production occurs in an African country, it is necessarily connected to a wider cultural change concerning art's role in society, to what I call a new art system.

Typically, in the case of the Nigerian early modernist Ben Enwonwu we can talk of a paradigm shift coinciding with a generation shift. Enwonwu's father was locally active as a venerated producer of masks and utensils for masquerades and ritual ceremonies, while his son, given the opportunity of a modern artistic training in Nigeria and in London, produced paintings and sculptures for collectors, museums and institutions – one of his sculptures is to be seen at the UN headquarters in New York – and exhibited internationally. Father and son were active within different art systems.⁴

The initial art historical research was developed in three phases, firstly a trawl through archives and libraries in diverse European countries;⁵ secondly attempts to test the legitimacy of this base of collected knowledge and develop it by analysing specific discourses and their applicability to African contexts;⁶ and thirdly collecting new knowledge and reinvestigating some of the discourses in field studies during intensive research in Nigeria and South Africa in 1995.⁷ In 2006 access to the University Library in Sacramento, USA, subsequently made it possible to conduct a more critical

discussion of sources in the research for the essay ‘The Black Atlantic and the Paradigm Shift to Modern Art in Africa’.⁸

Three practical circumstances marked the methodology of the art historical research. The research was subjectively initiated and carried out with no academic affiliation or grants. It had to rely on limited access to library services by focusing on critical analyses rather than on broad surveys and discussions of existing sources. The research benefited from using a diversity of publishing forums with different readership and editorial expectations, conditions that couldn’t but occasion certain repetitions. These factors meant nevertheless a freedom. I was not bound within the discourse of any art historical school, nor to any specified research theme staked out in advance. It allowed me to concentrate on a non-academic and captivating style of writing with links to the informal approach in *Woman in the World*.

Like many modern Third World visual artists, who in similar ways have taken to the pen, I worked driven by the ambition to contribute experience and ideas in a field found persistently to be marginalised by academia. Nonetheless, written contributions by visual artists to recent historiography of Third World modernisms have, as evidenced by publications such as *Third Text*, contributed to stimulate new approaches among young art historians also in the field of modern African art.

Finally, the research connected to the project *The Ethics of the Wound* followed more closely a common scholarly discipline of building upon and critically discussing the relevant literature within psychiatry and cultural studies. It was at the same time more experimental by applying experience from my own artistic practice to theoretical observations on trauma. It meant that my understanding of trauma partly was conceived through art works. This helped me to extend trauma studies into the domain of visual art, a field in which I believe to have made an original contribution.

Chapter one presents an account of how I developed the notion of psychological trauma that represents a consistent thread, implicit or explicit, running through the research. It builds mainly on psychiatric theories on individual post-traumatic disorder. This

research has aimed at understanding the impact of a black cultural trauma on the trajectory of modern African art, but since this subject was scantily documented or researched, I had to refer to documented western examples of cultural trauma inflicted by sudden social change as basis for comparisons and transference.

The second chapter discusses how the multifaceted project *Woman in the World* was initially conceived as a counter-discourse to social anthropology, a discipline I had been studying at university, but of which I had become increasingly critical. *Woman in the World* represented a shift to a more open and experimental form of research, in which I emphasised nonverbal visual and poetical forms of communication and intimate dialogues characterised by listening to testimonies.

The third chapter discusses modern art in Africa, focusing on its emergence, its pioneers and its development up to and including the early postcolonial time, the art historical research for which was initiated in 1992. This chapter refers to the essays on modern African art published between 1992 and 2009.

The fourth chapter discusses in more detail how I proceeded to extend trauma studies – until then mostly referencing literature – to the field of visual art, including my own attempts visually to work through traumatic experience. I specify how my approach, whose starting point was my own art practice, differs from the approach of scholars who mainly deal with trauma and art from the point of view of an observer. These issues are articulated through a discussion of the project *Ethics of the Wound* and the multidisciplinary elaboration of trauma studies.

In the fifth chapter I conclude the debate on cultural trauma with a critique of the sociological school of cultural trauma studies, which maintains that cultural trauma should be understood as a collective identity-forming process with no relation to the psychiatric perspective on trauma. I also relate this critique to a discussion of the nature of the African cultural trauma, referring to new research within political science and revisiting my art historical research on the development of modern art in Africa.

In the Conclusion I pull together different threads of the research, relating it to a double philosophical inspiration from Soren Kierkegaard and Ibn Khaldun, and summarise some of the key contributions in order to identify what I perceive as inadequacies in early and recent historical research into African modernism and to discuss the pathway that may need further exploration.

Endnotes

1. There exist several other markets which fall outside my research, to some degree domestic but mainly foreign, such as the restricted market of collectable pre-modern African art and the global markets of copies of it (sometimes even produced in Japan or elsewhere), the likewise global markets of African tourist and airport art and the markets of African popular art.
2. Chika Okeke, 'Modern African Art' in Okwui Enwezor (ed.) *The Short Century. Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994*, Munich, London, New York: Prestel 2001.
3. Koju Fosu,, *20th Century Art of Africa* (Zaria, Nigeria: Gaskiya, 1986, vi. In his thesis, Fosu ambitiously tried to cover all Africa south of the Sahara. I commented critically on several of his analyses in my essay 'Bourdieu out of Europe?' He appears not to have published further work on the subject, and his thesis is rarely referenced outside an Anglophone West African context.
4. Chinedu C.Chukueggu, 'Modern Artistic Tendency in Nigeria: Its Influence on the Creative Development' ,a paper delivered at the Department of Fine Art and Design, University of Port Harcourt, River State, Nigeria, published in *Anthropologist* 12 (3) 2010, 165-173. It builds partly on Kojo Fosu.
5. Sylvester Ogbechie, *Ben Enwonwu: The Making of an African Modernist*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008.
- 6.The research was incited by a public polemic with a Swedish curator, in which the bias towards me as an African artist as well as the ignorance manifested about modern African art were apparent. This polemic prompted a leading Swedish art magazine, *Konstperspektiv*, to commission a lengthy essay on modern African art, which made extensive research necessary.
7. Among newly published works that facilitated revision was a re-issue (in German) of *Negerplastik* (1915) by the German art historian, critic and author Carl Einstein, one of the first to classify pre-modern African visual works as art. In his introduction the author argues that racial prejudices permeate European attitudes towards African achievements. This outspokenness was liberating, because as Toni Morrison writes in *Playing in the Dark* (1990), 'in matter of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled'. My study of *Negerplastik* occasioned an inquiry into the role of European anthropology, the critique of which was central to the initiation of my research. The anthropological approach to African art manifested itself in a kind of protracted war between those who like Einstein perceived sub-Saharan Africa as a great contributor in visual art and those who persevered in treating African visual products as ethnographic objects. The essay resulting from the research, 'Meeting Carl Einstein', represented an early critical

introduction in English of Einstein's role, an issue recently paid scholarly attention to both in UK and in the USA.

Similarly, the essay 'Bourdieu out of Europe?', which analysed the French Cultural Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's field theory on visual art in *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), and which additionally built upon direct correspondence with the author, took his ideas a step further by testing their applicability to the field of modern art in Africa in order to examine new starting points for a theorisation of modern African art historiography. Bourdieu's analysis of how European modernism emerged in the 19th century as a new 'field' with specific conditions provided a ground for my concept of western art practices as a specific paradigm to be compared to the paradigm of pre-modern African art practices.

The methodology developed during the early phase of research, in combination with my repeated call for a scholarly disciplined art historical approach to modern African art both in writing and in curating exhibitions, contributed to the commission to write an art historical catalogue essay for the exhibition *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* at Whitechapel Art Gallery in London 1995. This commission required research in Nigeria and South Africa.

8. The research in Nigeria and South Africa included interviews with artists, curators and scholars with key positions within the countries' history of modern art, research in museums and private collections combined with collecting documents and photographs for the archives of the Institute of International Visual Arts, Iniva, London. Among museums thoroughly researched were Nigeria's National Gallery of Modern Art (with catalogue *The Nucleus*), Johannesburg Art Gallery, The South African National Gallery in Cape Town and The Collection of the University of Fort Hare in De Beers Centenary Art Gallery, Fort Hare, the latter museum exclusively devoted to black South African art and where I interviewed the collector, anthropologist E.J. de Jager, author of the book/catalogue *Images of Man*. Among key interviewees were leading art historians Ola Ololade, Elizabeth Rankins, Elza Miles and Marilyn Martin and among artists in Nigeria Bruce Onobrakpeya, Uche Okeke, Gani Odutokun, Obiora Udechukwu and El Anatsui and in South Africa the artists David Koloane, Cecil Skotnes and Ptika Ntuli. I also made an extensive interview with art gallery owner Linda Givon of the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg.

9. I am grateful to Professor Elaine O'Brien for the opportunity.

CHAPTER 1: TOWARDS A NOTION OF TRAUMA

This chapter discusses the notion of psychological trauma and cultural trauma developed through critical studies of psychiatric and sociological research and related cultural studies. These studies are assessed in relation to my experience of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD.

Among the studies on cultural trauma emerging in the early years of the third millennium, little specific research had been done on the generation of collective traumas following the sweeping social and cultural change wrought by colonisation and colonial rule in African countries. Among the few available references, Neil Smelzer's essay on individual and cultural trauma mentions, as an example of cultural trauma, the 'imposition of Western values on colonial societies'.¹ Given the paucity of scholarly enquiry into a black cultural trauma caused by colonialism in Africa we can only try to imagine what kind of destructive politico-sociological process Chinua Achebe hints to with the suggestive title of his seminal novel *Things Fall Apart*. The novel gives a vivid image of pre-modern cultural patterns in an Igbo society in today's Nigeria, which is confronted by European colonising power. In an interview in 2000 the author acknowledged that it is about atonement, about what has been lost, with 'our heritage (...) endangered for a very, very long time',² To get an idea of the 'falling apart' in terms of a cultural trauma, it has been necessary to rely in the research on parallel processes, from which it may be possible to draw analogies with the African context.

During the preparation of my first essay on trauma and art I interviewed the Russian artist Oleg Kulik about his performance 'as a mad dog'. His response was that '[it] is about a deep cultural trauma. It is about the fact that all cultural contexts have collapsed and the bonds which should unite humans and hold them upright are ruined, leaving us down on our knees.' According to Kulik his performance testified to 'the enormous trauma produced by the sudden collapse of the former Soviet Union.' And he continued: 'The speed of events left people without words. It left them trying to hold their lives together merely with their senses, and sick feelings'.³

Further research has confirmed Kulik's analysis. 'The traumatogenic change seems to exhibit four traits', writes the Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka in an essay on cultural

trauma, in which he deals with what he terms ‘postcommunist trauma’ as an example of a collective trauma caused by sudden social change.⁴ He summarises four characteristic traits, which, he argues, produced a cultural trauma. It was sudden and rapid. It touched many aspects of life. It was a radical, deep, fundamental change that touched the core aspects of social life and personal fate. It was unexpected and shocking. It is reasonable to assume that many of these traumatogenic characteristics can be applied to an Africa under the shock of colonisation.



Fig.1. Uche Okeke, Illustration to Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, drawing 1962.



Fig.2. Oleg Kulik *The Mad Dog (or the last Taboo guarded by the Lonely Cerber)*, Gallery Krinzing

However, my initial research into the psychiatric literature on trauma and on relations between trauma and visual art focused on individual psychological trauma, only subsequently including discussions of cultural trauma.

My notion of trauma was developed from critical studies in specialist psychiatric literature, philosophical and cultural writings on trauma as well as published testimonies by trauma sufferers. An essential component of this notion was conceived through art practice rather than applied to it. The notion has successively been checked against observations of the author’s own subjective trauma process and been confirmed by its symptoms and its reflections in the artistic practice. This may be perceived as a risky intermingling of subjective and objective approaches. But it can also be seen from another point of view. Laboratory psychiatric experiments with trauma have been ethically unacceptable. Consequently, psychiatric research has had to build on

survivors' subjective memories and testimonies. The self-reflection in this case can be said to be situated not completely beyond scholarly practice, especially as it is not uncommon that interlocutors with survivors have themselves been directly or indirectly engaged with traumatic experience.⁵

Trauma may be summarized as a multifaceted individual psychological disorder caused by an external traumatic event or by repeated events. This represents a psychiatrically based interpretation, which informs my cultural and philosophical reflections on trauma and also my concept of cultural trauma.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Sigmund Freud noted that 'the symptomatic picture presented by traumatic neurosis approaches that of hysteria'.⁶ He thereby referred back to his and Joseph Breuer's earlier studies on hysteria as neuroses inflicted by women's traumatising experiences⁷, a discourse he subsequently abandoned in order to develop his theories of psychoanalysis. The traumatic neuroses that he observed were those abundantly evidenced by the symptoms of so called 'shell shocked' soldiers in World War I. He noted that these neuroses fell outside the realm of psychoanalysis. In spite of the fact that through his early research he had established a platform for trauma studies and that he would inform and enrich the understanding of trauma with many of his central thoughts on memory, consciousness and mourning, the observation that he made in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is of importance here. It marked the detachment of trauma studies from orthodox psychoanalytic theory. While the former discipline deals with symptoms caused by an external reality, '[p]sychoanalysis became a study of the internal vicissitudes of fantasy and desire, dissociated from the reality of experience'⁸

Naming something means in a sense making it real. This seems at least to apply to the official acceptance and naming in 1980 of the psychiatric diagnosis PTSD.⁹ It triggered a fast expansion of scholarly research, therapeutic initiatives, cultural interpretations and social and political responses to the phenomenon of post-traumatic disorders, an expansion that has accelerated in recent years. Although this development has sometimes been questioned as a whim of fashion, it would probably be historically

more correct to describe the current urge to penetrate all different aspects of trauma in the light of something that several scholars have pointed to, namely a protracted tardiness by the psychiatric profession realistically to assess the magnitude of problems caused by PTSD.

When epidemiological research started in the late 1980s, only one in 100 people exposed to traumatic events connected to war and natural disasters was assumed to develop PTSD. This soon proved to be a serious underestimation: studies in the 1990s suggested that 10-20% of exposed people develop PTSD. Considering that, according to the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, natural catastrophes between 1967 and 1991 killed seven million people and affected three billion, and that 127 wars since World War II killed 21.8 million people, one is forced to assume that PTSD as an individual psychological disorder must be alarmingly prevalent and represent widespread social problems.¹⁰



Fig.3. Evelyn Nicodemus, *Reference Scroll on Genocide, Massacres and Ethnic Cleansing*, stitched linen columns 2004.

As implicitly demonstrated in my work *Reference Scroll on Genocide, Massacres and Ethnic Cleansing*, 2004¹¹, traumatic disorder was inflicted upon humanity throughout history, long before psychiatry invented a terminology to be able to talk about it. A pre-existing common awareness of trauma, found reflected for instance in Homer's *Iliad*¹², has been replaced by formal scientific research into the phenomenon. During its

existence for around a century, the psychiatric profession has vacillated between commitment and repression close to denial.¹³ In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Lewis Herman entitles a historical survey of professional relations to trauma ‘a history of episodic amnesia’.¹⁴

Herman’s seminal work, informed by feminist practice and theory, provides a knowledgeable account of what trauma clinically and theoretically means, of how PTSD functions and also of the difficult road to recovery. It became a primary guide to my more scientific inquiry into trauma. Her study has been assessed in bibliographic surveys as the most important psychiatric contribution to the expanding trauma research in the key decade of the 1990s.¹⁵

A classical example of overly cautious approaches by the psychiatric establishment to the question of how to deal with PTSD is represented by the first official definition of the criteria of assessment. Its wording stresses that the criteria consist of ‘characteristic symptoms following *a* psychologically distressing event that is *outside* the range of usual human experience’ (my italics).¹⁶ Herman’s experience in clinical work with battered women and child abuse, dealing with examples of evident traumas which in no way can be located outside everyday life, enabled her to correct what could be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to reduce something of frequent occurrence to something being exceptional.

Her intervention in the debate on the definition of PTSD opened up a much wider field for analyses of trauma and of listening to testimonies and has been decisive for my own trauma studies and studies on trauma and art. Likewise instructive has been her demonstration that PTSD can be caused by repeated traumatic events and events occurring over a long period. There is a spectrum of traumatic disorders, she explains, that ranges from the effects of a single overwhelming event to the more complicated effects of prolonged and repeated abuse. Her insistence on the latter, which she proposes to call ‘complex post-traumatic stress disorder’¹⁷, can be understood as referring to situations such as political oppression, crude persecution, and racist, sexist,

homophobic and anti-Semitic or Islamo-phobic abuse. Significantly the subtitle of *Trauma and Recovery* reads *From Domestic Violence to Political Terror*.

What became integrated in my notion of trauma from Herman's research was above all this expanded view and her insight into the potentially serious nature of the disorders that can be inflicted. 'Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis'.¹⁸ About traumatic memory she writes that it 'is wordless and static'.¹⁹ She notes that '[g]iven the "iconic", visual nature of traumatic memories, creating pictures may represent the most effective initial approach to these "indelible" images'.²⁰ It is an observation made in the context of healing therapies but not without interest in an analysis of the relation between trauma and visual art. To listen to trauma, she writes, means to play 'the role of a witness and ally, in whose presence the survivor can speak of the unspeakable'²¹, 'empathically to share the experience of helplessness'²², but also in many cases 'to bear witness to a crime'.²³ By this means the PTSD victim 'discovers that she is not crazy; that the traumatic syndromes are normal human responses to extreme circumstances'.²⁴

Concerning the three main symptoms of PTSD - hyperarousal, intrusion and constriction - she notes that 'hyperarousal reflects the persistent expectation of danger; intrusion reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment; constriction reflects the numbing response of surrender'.²⁵ And she concludes that the alternation between intrusive and numbing symptoms represents a dialectic of trauma which 'is perhaps the most characteristic feature of the post-traumatic syndromes'.²⁶ This has informed my analysis of the tensions in trauma's interferences in artistic creation, which not least seem to be related to the numbing blockages of traumatic memories and to difficulties in representing the intrusive imprints of the traumatic moment. It partly confirms the observation by Elaine Scarry that physical pain more or less lacks a language.²⁷

Another decisive source for the development of my notion of trauma was Cathy Caruth's psychoanalytically based writings about trauma and memory, in particular *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*.²⁸ Stating that the precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder is contested, she also notes that 'most descriptions generally agree that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event'. This is what Freud called repetition compulsion. But she clarifies that 'the pathology cannot be defined by the event itself ... nor can it be defined in terms of a *distortion* of the event'.²⁹ In her subsequent analytical reading - in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* - of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*³⁰, she analyses traumatic experiences as 'experiences not of wholly possessed, fully grasped, or completely remembered events, but more complexly, of partially unassimilated or "missed" experiences'.³¹

In *Mourning and Melancholia* Freud treats the two psychological notions of mourning and melancholia as binary, the former representing a desirable way of working through loss and the latter an infinitive pathological condition.³² Caruth, who defines PTSD as 'not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history'³³, tends to resolve the opposition in her analysis of traumatic experience. Her writings on mourning have become a starting point for studies in melancholia as representing a symbolic form of black resistance to racial oppression.³⁴

As already hinted, there is in this complex process of forgetting-while-remembering elements of blockage and taboo, which in my research I have found to represent a crucial syndrome when it comes to attempts to speak the unspeakable in trauma related literature and visual art. The victim's possession by her trauma, a common symptom of PTSD, forces her persistently to return to the traumatic event, which like a 'gaping, vertiginous black hole' proves to be inaccessible and inexpressible.³⁵ I will return to this oddly productive tension in the discussion of the relationship between trauma and visual art in Chapter Four.

Two historically recent traumatic events have left us with ‘grand narratives’ of psychological disorders: the Holocaust and the Vietnam War. Within documentation of Holocaust, literary testimonies by survivors like Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi³⁶ have been important sources for my research. And the critical literature taking the Holocaust as a starting point for cultural and philosophical studies has been a source of inspiration and reflection, not least when it deals with the matter of trauma and representation.³⁷

A horrific lesson taught by the Holocaust concerning trauma, memory and testifying has been the magnitude and the persistence of the silence of its surviving victims. Many survivors of the death camps were for several decades psychologically inhibited from telling their stories to the world and even to their families. Listening to silence has consequently become and remains a central aspect of attempting to understand trauma. By contrast the angry, loud voices of American Vietnam Veterans managed to raise public awareness of PTSD, since representatives of their anti-war movement in 1970 had begun to coordinate activities with politically committed psychiatrists like Robert Jay Lifton³⁸. Though having served on the side of the aggressors, they claimed that they suffered severely from war traumas and that they too were victims. It meant that PTSD at last could be talked about openly. Ultimately it forced an official recognition in 1980 of post-traumatic stress disorder as a psychiatric diagnosis.

There is one further source to mention among those contributing to the notion of trauma developed in my research. In the essay ‘The Ethics of the Wound’ (2004), which was a summary of my research to date, I wrote: ‘In the USA in October 2003, the President’s Council in Bioethics published a report entitled *Beyond Therapy- Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness*. One of its subjects was the way traumatic memories of unendurable stress can be burned into the mind and cause persistent psychological disorders’.³⁹ The report proposed that the emotional sting produced in the brain was caused by an overflow of chemical stimuli, which, while originally aimed at mobilising the body’s self-defence, in a situation of overwhelming stress was too strong to be neutralised, whereby it produced enduring compulsive memories and psychological disorders. I have not seen the report referred to in subsequent psychiatric literature, and biotechnology is not my area of expertise. But it provided, through the scientific

research to which it referred, an illustration of the circumstance that trauma is caused by a real event and has a clearly physiological dimension. It represents a confirmation of what is a cornerstone in my basic notion of trauma, that trauma is to be understood as a wound.

Endnotes

1. Neil J. Smelzer, 'Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma', in J.Alexander et al (eds), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press 2004, 38.
2. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London: William Heinemann Ltd 1958. The novel is included in African school curricula according to an information given to me by Dr. Afe Adogame, School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh. The interview by Obiora Udechukwu with Chinua Achebe in 2000 is published in Okwui Enwezor (ed.) *The Short Century. Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994* Munich, London, New York: Prestel 2001, 314-19. *Things Fall Apart* was republished by Heinemann in their *African Writers Series* 1962 with illustrations by Uche Okeke, a prominent modern Nigerian artist of the same generation as the author (fig.1).
3. Everlyn Nicodemus, 'Modernity as a Mad Dog: On Art and Trauma', in G.Mosquera and J.Fisher (eds), *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and The MIT Press 2004, 266-267.
4. Piotr Sztompka, 'The Trauma of Social Change. A Case of Postcommunist Societies', in J.C.Alexander et al (eds), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press 2004, 158-159, 171.
5. See Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery. From Domestic Violence to Political Terror*, London: Pandora 1998, 140. Dori Laub also refers to the same kind of 'hazards of listening'. See Dori Laub, 'Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening' in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, New York, London: Routledge 1992, 72-73.
6. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (in German 1920), transl. James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psychoanalysis 1961, 6.
7. Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria* (Vienna 1895), transl. James and Alix Strachey, New York: Basic Book, Inc 1957.
8. Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, op. cit. 7.
9. PTSD as a diagnosis was formally recognised in the diagnostic canon in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, American Psychiatric Association (APA), 3rd edition (DSM-III), 1980. Beside this quite dominating American manual of guiding principles there exists an international manual issued by the World Health Organization, ICD-9.
10. Alexander C. McFarlane and Giovanni de Girolani 'The Nature of Traumatic Stressor and the Epidemiology of Posttraumatic Reactions' in Alexander C. McFarlane and Giovanni de Girolani,

Traumatic Stress. The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society, New York: The Guilford Press 1996, 129-155.

11. Evelyn Nicodemus, *Reference Scroll on Genocide, Massacres and Ethnic Cleancing*, stitched linen columns with digitally printed texts, 2004, 1.600 cm x 147 cm. In the artist's collection (fig.3).

12. See for instance Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam and the Undoing of Character*, New York: MacMillan 1994.

13. Evidenced repeatedly in McFarlane and Girolani op. cit, xi, 136. 'Psychiatry has periodically suffered from marked amnesias'. 'The ability of mental health professionals to dismiss the significance of these experiences in the past (...) is an issue that highlights the power of prevailing paradigms to influence observation and models of aetiology'.

14. Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, op. cit. 7.

15. Lisa S. Beall, *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: A Bibliographic Essay*, <http://www.lib.auburn.edu/socsci/docs/ptsd.html>, accessed to 25.05.2009. It is a version of an article published in *Choice*, 1997, 34(6), 917-930.

16. The American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM III* (quoted from edition Washington DC 1987), 247.

17. Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, op. cit. 119.

18. Ibid 51.

19. Ibid 175.

20. Ibid 177.

21. Ibid 175.

22. Ibid 141.

23. Ibid 135.

24 Ibid 158.

25. Ibid 35.

26. Ibid 47.

27. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1985.

28. Cathy Caruth, ed. and introduction, *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press 1995. As Janice Cheddie has pointed out, Caruth's assertion that trauma experience can be communicated through literature and other cultural products as something that can be shared by victims and non-victims alike has been criticised as debasing the concept of trauma. Janice Cheddie, 'Listening to Trauma in the Art of Evelyn Nicodemus', *Third Text*, Vol. 21, Issue 1, 2007, 85. It is a critique I only partly share. The occurrence of secondary traumatisation has been well documented. On the other hand the emotional identification in general with trauma victims should not be exaggerated to a degree where notions become confused and at the expense of a more intellectual response.

29. Ibid 4.

30. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996.

31. Ibid 124. See also F.Guerin and R.Hallas (eds.) *The Image and the Witness. Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*, (London & New York: Wallflower Press. 2007), 159.
32. Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' in S. Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, London: Penguin Classics 2005, 203-204.
33. Cathy Caruth, ed. and introduction, *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, op. cit. 5.
34. Eva Tettenborn, 'Melancholia as resistance in contemporary African American literature', *Melus*, Sept, 2006.
35. Judith Lewis Herman, op. cit. 26.
36. Elie Wiesel's book in Yiddish *Un die Velt Hot Geshvigt* (And the World Remained Silent), written in 1954, was published in French in 1958 and was the first in a trilogy *Night, Dawn, Day*. Primo Levi, *If this is a Man*, 1947, is a memory about survival in Auschwitz.
37. Among the works especially to mention are Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust*, Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press 2000, and Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, New York: Zone Books 1999. The 9 ½ hour documentary film *Shoah* (1985) by Claude Lanzmann is of central importance in the discussion on the Holocaust representation. The filmmaker argues that any attempt to represent or explain the Holocaust would be immoral, because it as an event is beyond understanding. Among the many writers who have commented upon the film is Dominick LaCapra in *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1998.
I share Rothberg's reservations concerning what he (on page 5) calls the antirealist tendency to be found both with Wiesel and Lanzmann in their claim that the Holocaust is to be perceived as completely unique, a claim against which Tzvetan Todorov has argued that every genocide is unique. Tzvetan Todorov, *Les Abus de la Memoire*, Paris: Arlea 1998. That passage by Todorov was central to the idea of my work *Reference Scroll on Genocide, Massacres and Ethnic Cleansing* (2004).
38. Judith Lewis Herman, op cit. 26.
39. Evelyn Nicodemus, "The Ethics of the Wound", in A.Van den Braembussche et al (eds), *Intercultural Aesthetics. A World Perspective*, Springer Science 2009, 192.

CHAPTER 2: LISTENING TO SILENCE, SPEAKING THROUGH IMAGES, WOMAN IN THE WORLD AS COUNTER-DISCOURSE

This chapter focuses on *Woman in the World*, 1984-86, the project that initiated the submitted research. Its background was a disagreement with much of the theory and practice of social anthropology, a subject I had been studying but abandoned, turning to visual art practice as a counter-discourse of communication and interaction.

The critique of anthropology played a decisive role in two phases of the research, in the project *Woman in the World*, where it represented arguments for a counter-discourse, and subsequently in the art historical investigation into modern African art, during which I came to consider the general anthropological approach to contemporary art in Africa as a main problem in the then existing writing on the subject. While theoretical considerations were taken into account in the critique of the literature, ethical objections to practices typical of anthropological fieldwork constituted the main driving force of the search for alternatives in *Woman in the World*.

I shall discuss the disagreements with anthropology and also reflect upon two sides of what became an alternative discourse and method of research, a specific way of listening in dialogue and the transference of thoughts through paintings as part of a continuous interaction.

My turn away from social anthropology towards visual art practice was a deliberate countermove to tendencies in anthropological theory and practice, with which I had come to disagree ideologically. The revolt took place in 1980 when I was back in my native country Tanzania preparing my anthropological fieldwork.¹ I was offered the opportunity to make a one-woman exhibition at the National Museum in Dar es Salaam. I designed the exhibition as an unconventional installation of paintings, painted objects and poems written in Swahili, English and Swedish. It represented the logical consequence of the countermove rather than a step into the career of an artist, an identity that I still hesitated to claim. The aim was to find, by means of experimentation,

alternatives to the authoritarian interpretative control of humans as objects of study that I had found intrinsic to anthropological practice.²

The exhibition marked my departure from anthropology and also, in several ways, a starting point for the research that was to follow from 1984 to 2009. The years at the university had introduced me to the practice of academic study and of systematic critical reading. Studying anthropology had in my case at the very least meant training in observing and analysing human behaviour, a faculty that was to influence my subsequent research. I thus took with me something of what I left behind.

In Sweden during the 1970s, social anthropology was perceived as a new discipline of social knowledge, which attracted increasing numbers of students of the post-1968 generation. It was thought to have settled accounts with many of the evolutionary and racist myths of an earlier anthropology and to have developed a less judgemental and more objective approach to the study of society. Still, in a wider context, the 1970s was the decade when anthropology increasingly saw its authority undermined through new critical ideas.³

For somebody who had been confronted with everyday racist attitudes for the first time on migrating to Europe, to study social anthropology seemed to offer the intellectual means better to understand human behaviour. Nevertheless, two paradoxes soon caused hesitation. The 'world', which the discipline was supposed to study, proved mainly to consist of delimited societies in most cases perceived as 'exotic'. And the 'humanity' presumed to be its study object seemed throughout to be represented by subaltern categories. Anthropology's historical subservience to imperialism could in the long run not avoid disturbing someone like myself born in a colonial protectorate.

Having reached the stage of undergraduate fieldwork, what made me break with social anthropology was what I perceived as a lack of ethics and respect for fellow humans in the approach of anthropologists in the field. Attitudes and procedures with which I especially disagreed had to do with isolation, objectification and the violence of theory. Isolation, a term sometimes used in critical overviews, stands for the authoritative

position of the researcher hidden behind his notepad, the total lack of reciprocity and equality in the dialogue between ‘observer’ and ‘observed’ and also for the absence of any return of the extracted knowledge to the community of the interviewees.

The metaphor for objectification that I often resorted to was one I encountered in a quotation from the pioneering Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembene: ‘You Look at Us as if We Were Insects’.⁴ And what I here call the violence of theory refers not least to the arbitrary procedure of streamlining data collected in the field by adjusting them to preconceived anthropological discourses.⁵

Observing this in many ways warped relation between theory and field practice made me sceptical about the role of preconceived theories in similar research activities. When I began conceiving and planning for the project *Woman in the World*, this hesitance was probably why I deliberately avoided building on any cultural theory or discourse prevalent in Sweden at the time. I started out from the observation, following talks with women at my first exhibitions in Sweden, that behind the female emancipation and empowerment, generally thought to be typical of Scandinavian societies, was still hidden a deep uncertainty and vacillation in female self-esteem.

I explored ways of replacing subject-object inquiry with forms of subject-to-subject communication. In retrospect, this represented a search to some extent parallel to what I later on would find both in Jurgen Habermas’ theory of intersubjectivity and in Emmanuel Levinas’ I-Thou ethics. Habermas writes about an intersubjectivist paradigm of ‘communicative action’ in terms of ‘a noncoercive intersubjectivity of mutual understanding and reciprocal recognition’.⁶ while ‘knowledge is held by Levinas to be a kind of violence when deployed against human beings’. The Other is to be encountered, addressed in dialogue.⁷

The recurrent point of departure of the talks with women that were basic to the project *Woman in the World* was the question ‘what is it to you to be a woman?’, inviting spontaneous reflections and testimonies on all aspects of female existence from social conditions to conceptions of womanliness. The scheme *Woman in the World* consisted

of three separate projects developed during residences in three different geographies, Skive, in the province of Jutland, Denmark, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal, India (plates 9-31). The outcomes were as follows:



Fig.1. Everlyn Nicodemus, W in the W 1, Skive, *La Femme II*, oil painting 1984.



Fig.2. Everlyn Nicodemus, W in the W 2, Dar es Salaam, *Her son*, oil painting 1985.



Fig.3. Everlyn Nicodemus, W in the W 3, Calcutta, *The sari*, oil painting 1986.

Skive: thirty paintings and 17 poems were produced during the summer 1984 in the provincial town Skive, an educational centre, and exhibited in the autumn of the same year at Skive Museum. A catalogue in Swedish was produced that lists the exhibited works with reproductions in black and white and colour, accompanied by related poems (attached as documentation).⁸

Dar es Salaam: twenty-five paintings and a number of poems were produced and exhibited in Dar es Salaam's National Museum in the summer of 1985. A simple photocopied catalogue in the form of folded A3 pages with introductory text by art critic Kristian Romare was pre-produced in Stockholm, presenting the idea of the project and summarising the Skive experience (attached as documentation).⁹

Calcutta: twenty paintings and a number of poems were produced in late autumn 1986, and shown at the exhibition centre Sisirmanch in Calcutta. As in Tanzania, a pre-produced photocopied catalogue presented the idea (attached as documentation). The involvement of visitors to the exhibition was conspicuous, with women often seen copying the poems. And the press wrote abundantly about the show perceiving it as a feminist manifestation.¹⁰

It is important to note that each of the productions was preceded by extensive talks with women of the region of different age, class and profession, mostly in the form of intimate dialogues and sometimes as equally intimate group talks. In Tanzania, the talks were conducted in my native region of Kilimanjaro, and in Calcutta they were held in middle class circles, slums and outlying villages.



Fig.4. Group talks in a West Bengalese village 1986.

A central idea in the project had been inspired by the observation that the artist's paintings about her personal traumatic experiences stimulated unreserved testimonies from the viewers. This prompted the preliminary plan of an interactive structure consisting of alternately oral and visual communications. The dialogical approach was designed to share emotional experiences rather than conventionally to interview the partners and, in a therapeutic way, to bring forth traumatic memories. When new dialogues were held at the exhibition and in the presence of the paintings, which had been produced as visual testimonies to the original conversations, this therapeutic effect was strengthened as the images functioned as psychological stimuli.

Listening to trauma in dialogue was an essential part of this communicative process. Stemming originally from a critique of anthropological methods of communication, *Woman in the World* implicitly contained the fundamental elements of trauma studies that were to be more explicitly addressed in subsequent essays and in the project *Ethics of the Wound*. In a penetrating review of my later trauma related production Janice Cheddie writes 'the conduct of listening as a cultural and discursive process (...) extends the concept of testimony to include the role of the listener in bringing the testimony of the trauma survivor into the public sphere'.¹¹

When it comes to listening, the similarities between on the one side the talks conducted within *Woman in the World* and on the other the general practice in psychiatric trauma therapy can hardly be overlooked. In both cases the listener's physical presence conditions the testimonies. Dori Laub writes, '[b]earing witness to a trauma is in fact a process that includes a listener ...[who] is to be unobtrusively present'.¹² On the other hand the difference in role and position is crucial between the two cases. In psychiatric treatment '[t]he patient enters therapy in need of help and care. By virtue of this fact, she voluntarily submits herself to an unequal relationship in which the therapist has superior status and power'.¹³ But in the communicative encounters in *Woman in the World*, equality in status distinguishes from the beginning the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. The listener makes it clear by introducing herself as being an equally traumatized woman. This rather than any professionalism enables her to induce situations of testimonies and listening.



Fig.5. Everlyn Nicodemus, *Silence*, tempera on bleached linen, 1984.

A significant point in common with the two approaches is that listening to trauma necessarily includes listening to silence and listening through silence. About bearing witness and the vicissitudes of listening, Laub writes: 'The listener must ... *listen to and hear the silence*, speaking mutely both in silence and in speech'.¹⁴ To have discerned this crucial meaning of silence played a vital role in the design of a methodological solution of the seemingly insolvable problem of translating talks into paintings and poems. I realised that the quintessence of the oral communication was to be found in the moments of silence, of common emotional muteness pregnant with traumatic feelings. I started the pictorial production in Skive with a series called 'Silence', painted in white

on white in Egyptian tempera on old bleached linen (fig 5 and plate 2). For the catalogue I wrote a poem, which I gave the title 'Women's silence'. It might be perceived as a poetic manifesto for the whole project.¹⁵

Michel de Certeau writes about the problem that arises when theory has to advance over an area where there are no discourses and where a discourse cannot build upon another discourse. He talks of two different *operations*, one in and through language and the other without discourse. The latter, he writes, 'is composed of multiple but untamed operativities (...) It claims to conquer and annex not contemptible practices, but "ingenious", "complex", and "effective" forms of knowledge'.¹⁶

The interaction between oral and visual communication as an open ended form of research raises the question about the nature of 'visual speech'. In her study of art and trauma, *Empathic Vision, Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art*, to which I will return in Chapter Four, Jill Bennett notes in an afterword that '[w]e have rarely asked what it might mean to derive theory *from* the visual'.¹⁷ Referring to scholarly attempts to theorise art as 'thinking visually', she concludes that in her inquiry she has 'tried to find the measure of art and thought: to suggest how art might constitute a substantive critique or inquiry – a contribution to understanding'.¹⁸

When discussing communication through visual works, it is important to keep in mind that an image can be both more distinct and more open to interpretations than a text while having the power of being present in a more instant way.¹⁹ The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty points to this double nature of visual language. He writes about perceiving a painting 'by the way of the silent signals which (...) emanate from the traces of paint set down on the canvas', that they 'come to form a tightly structured arrangement in which one has the distinct feeling that nothing is arbitrary, even if one is unable to give a rational explanation of this'.²⁰ And Jean-Luc Nancy notes that what a painting presents, before any representation, is a presence.²¹ These philosophical clarifications have influenced my thinking about visual communication and assisted me in the dilemma that it means for a visual artist to analyse and characterise her own works.²²



Fig 6. Everlyn Nivodemus, *The gynaecological chair*, oil on canvas 1983.



Fig.7. Everlyn Nicodemus, *The Girl*, oil on canvas, 1984.

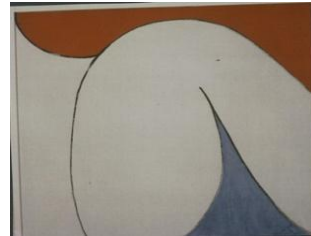


Fig.8 Everlyn Nicodemus. *It is wonderful to be a woman*, oil on canvas 1984.

Woman in the World was generally apprehended as having feminist overtones, and in most cases those associations constituted a dominant framework for public approach. The project could easily have been organised as a combination of fieldwork and in residence building on, for example, feminist theories and research or for that matter on sociological or political discourses.²³ The fact that it was kept within its own logic as an experimental and alternative form of inquiry and research does not mean that discussions and interactions with other theoretical categories were not implied. Such interactions were of both a practical and ideological nature and involved feminist as well as political groups and authorities. Already the basic problem of having permission to conduct organised interviews in countries like Tanzania and India required authorisation. In some cases external discussions provided important preparatory research materials.²⁴

On one level the project functioned as a strategy of intercultural transgression, using women's parallel experiences in patriarchal societies as points of recognition in order to overcome existing biases about cultural otherness. On another and principally perhaps more important level it represented a radical attempt to give women a space where to speak against the grain of the phallogentric tradition. In her text *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Gayatri Spivak compares the relationship between woman and silence with that between a colonized subaltern and non-speech. 'If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more

deeply in shadow...'.²⁵ This was the philosophy underlying the project to which the poem *Women's Silence* in the Skive catalogue pointed.²⁶

Finally, external conditions beyond my control contributed to make the project an open ended enterprise.²⁷

Endnotes

1. I had been living in Sweden for five years and been a Swedish citizen for three years, and I was then a student of social anthropology at the University of Stockholm.
2. I had been painting for only half a year and perceived it, beside writing poems and in combination with addressing an exhibition public, as an alternative way of communication rather than as a professional craft. The approach was emphasized by a visitors' book in which visitors to the exhibition were asked to respond.
3. Michel Foucault's writings on knowledge and on the power of institutions and Edward Said's writings on culture and imperialism contributed among other revolutionary ideas to smash the ground of respectability upon which anthropology had rested since more than a century. In recent years its historical role has been scrutinized in extremely harsh ways by critical anthropologists. See for instance S. P. Reyna, *Art and Mummery. Towards a Social Anthropology of Hypocrisy* at <http://les1.man.ac.uk/sa/MAN99Po1AnthPapers/stephen%20reyna.htm> with examples both of institutional corruption and subservience to colonial interests.
4. Jean Rouch and Ousmane Sembene, 'A historic Confrontation between Jean Rouch and Ousmane Sembene in 1965: "You Look at Us as if We Were Insects"'. In Okwui Enwezor (ed), *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994*, Munich, London, New York: Prestel 2001, 440-41.
5. To me the most disturbing example that I came across was the British-American anthropologist Colin Turnbull's report *The Mountain People*, London: Picador 1974, in which the author, in order to prove certain theories, seems to have firmly resolved clinically to observe the geno-suicide of a compulsorily displaced mountain people without stepping in to try to relieve or even to call attention to the misery inflicted on them. Turnbull writes on page 235: 'Luckily the Ik are not numerous – about two thousand – and those two years reduced their numbers greatly. So I am hopeful that their isolation will remain as complete as in the past, until they die out completely'. The book, which played a role in my decision to abandon my studies of anthropology, has had its accuracy and methodology seriously questioned for instance by linguists like Bernd Heine. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ik.
6. Quotation from the introductions to Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press 1987 (introduction by Thomas McCarthy), xvi;
7. Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, London: The Athlone Press, 1993 (introduction by the translator Michael B. Smith), xxiv.

8. The Skive catalogue, which is included among documentation of the art practice-related projects, contains reproductions of works discussed here. The title of the catalogue was 'La Femme', while the title given to the exhibition was 'Kvinnan i varlden' (Woman in the World). The subjects of the paintings and poems were connected to the basic theme of the project, 'What does it mean to be a woman?', and referred to the emotional spectrum of women's experiences, from their self-consciousness in paintings like *It is wonderful to be a woman* (fig.8 and plates 10 and 11), *Giggles* and *Revolution* via the double nature of motherhood, *Croix d'amour* (to be crucified on maternal love) and to traumas connected to domestic violence, to marriage as a prison, to women's bodies being used as experimental fields and to old women's stoic resignation (for reproductions see the Skive catalogue).

9. The themes of the paintings and poems in Dar es Salaam reflected more open contradictions between women's strength and women's oppression in a patriarchal society, censorship, hypocrisy and abortions desperately hidden. The old woman was here represented by the granny with a world of old traditions hidden in her jewel case, incomprehensible to the young generation (plates 12-19).

10. Against the background of poverty and of refugees from Bangladesh living in the streets of Calcutta, the themes had connections to the complex status of the bride and the housewife in India, the hidden forced labour of homework and the problematic effects of dowry practice. They also expressed women's anger, as in a painting coupled with the poem: 'Duties before dawn.../ I serve him./ Late in the night.../ I serve him./ My anger is day and night' and sometimes in form of provocations as in the poem 'Hello World!/ I am a woman!/ A woman am I./ Why are you so scared?' (plates 20-31).

11. Janice Cheddie, 'Listening to Trauma in the Art of Everlyn Nicodemus', *Third Text*, Vol. 21, Issue 1, January 2007, 30.

12. Dori Laub, 'Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening', in S.Felman and D.Laub (eds), *Testimony. Crises in Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, New York: Routledge 1992, 70, 71.

13. Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery. From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, London: Pandora 1994, 134.

14. Dori Laub, op. cit, 58.

15. Everlyn Nicodemus, *La Femme*, catalogue for the exhibition 'Kvinnan i varlden' at Skive Museum 1984. A translation of the poem 'Women's Silence' is attached as documentation.

16. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press 1984, 65.

17. Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision. Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press 2005, 134.

18. Ibid, 152.

19. A Swedish surrealist poet and draughtsman, Folke Dahlberg, explained the instant character of the perception of an image by comparing listening to music and seeing a drawing, arguing that while music equals torture, the drawing equals a stabbing. (Oral communication by Dahlberg to art historian Kristian Romare mediated to me).

20. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, New York: Routledge 2004, 96-97.

21. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press 1993, 348. My interest in the philosophical thinking of Merleau-Ponty and of Nancy – the idea of the flesh, the body, as mediating our recognition of the other and the outer world in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and the focusing on the touch and the presence in that of Nancy – was intimately connected to my practice as a visual artist. Merleau-Ponty was convinced that the world cannot be conceived as something outside the body. And Nancy found no sense in talking of body and thought as separate from one another. Both have written extensively about art and artistic production.

22. I will nevertheless in retrospect try to distinguish three concrete examples within the project in Skive, where paintings evoked respectively extended thoughts. A painting with the title *The gynaecological chair* (fig.6.) proved to be exceptionally provocative, triggering emotional reactions and thoughts. It seems to have done this mainly by visual means. The representation simplifies drastically an exposed situation which by many women is felt to be humiliating, reducing it to its main elements, the mechanical chair, the experience of being split open and having one's most private part exposed, the intrusive hand of the male gynaecologist and the spotlights as in a torture chamber. The painting can be said to present an instant sign of horror, at least that was my intention. In one case during the talks in Skive this triggered a spontaneous testimony by a woman who had been sexually abused as a child. After the shock of being examined by a gynaecologist she had refused to give birth in hospitals. She dreaded dentists and consequently had very bad teeth. Reacting to the painting, she suddenly realised that the dentist's chair had called forth the memory of the gynaecological chair.

One of the paintings that attracted interest and reflections during the renewed talks, *The Girl* (fig.7), represents a typical example of the interaction between poem and image. The poem summarizes an old woman's life experience in some few words: 'The dream / and / the years / - Little girl, / that is all'. In the painting, the drawn lines, which expand her furrows to become the visual pattern of the whole image, produce an atmosphere of quiet resignation. The girl behind her can be interpreted as being somebody listening to her as well as representing herself as a child or the memory of her childhood. The visual by its own means and with its various meanings can be said to articulate the sense of melancholy and of a split second of consciousness aimed at in the poem.

The last six paintings produced in Skive, which were given the title *It is wonderful to be a woman* (fig.8), were abstract and painted in bright and warm colours to counterbalance a predominant discourse of victimisation.

23. Rather than being connected to feminist theories, towards which my attitude was a combination of general acceptance of feminist causes and reservations about a western centrism embedded in feminist practices, *Woman in the World* was conducted against the backdrop of the UN's Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi 1985, in which disagreements between western and non-western feminist practices became apparent.

24. In Denmark, arrangements for the interviews were made informally in cooperation with Skive Museum. The interviewees were of different creeds. Some were committed feminists, among them a woman priest, and some were artists or craftswomen.

In Tanzania, permissions and security for interviews were organised politically with the assistance of UWT, the Women Organisation of Tanzania, which procured contact with women within the establishment and intellectual professions. As a native of the region of Kilimanjaro and through family connections I was able to complete this selection with informally arranged interviews. During my research in the country, the official Tanzanian delegation for the UN's Third World conference *End of Decade Conference on Women*, which was to take place in July 1985 in Nairobi, Kenya, invited me to participate in their discussions. My exhibition in Dar es Salaam was opened by the Minister for Women's Affairs.

In Calcutta, where the level of political, ideological and cultural consciousness was beyond comparison, the assistance in carrying through the project, which of course was more indispensable to me here than in my native country and in Scandinavia, was provided from several quarters. Introductory assistance, practical guidance and concluding feedback was offered by the All India Democratic Women's Association in Calcutta, while resourceful assistance came from West Bengal Democratic Writers Association Painters Front, both organisations with close links to the leftist West Bengal Government, which had invited me to do *Woman in the World* in Calcutta.

The historical interpenetration of political and cultural activities characterised West Bengal. Professor Ratnabali Chatterjee, founder of the independent feminist association SACHETANA, an art historian exceptionally clear in her analysis of the repression of women artists through history, took time to discuss perspectives of importance for the project, as did also journalists from the important magazine *EKSATHE, Cultural Monthly for Women*.

There is a further account to make about the preliminary work of preparation for the project. When I arrived in New Delhi, I was invited to a seminar at The Indian Social Institute to discuss the project in sociological terms. From New Delhi I took a bus to Chandigarh, capital of Indian Punjab, where the *Third National Conference on Women Studies* was going on. My background and project were known to the participants through *Manushi, A Journal About Women and Society*, and I was presented with a collection of all their conference papers, which gave me a broad knowledge of women's conditions and accomplishments in India.

In spite of the fact that I had been invited by a Marxist-Leninist government, the mainly liberal and bourgeois press in Calcutta treated the exhibition and the project as the work of an autonomous woman artist that happened to be a first in Calcutta as an artistic manifestation of feminist values. The questioning of my political affiliation came from the opposite side. In a concluding meeting, members of the All India Democratic Women's Association wanted from a Marxist point of view to politicize the interpretation of the project. They consequently urged me to admit being a Marxist. I answered them with a question: 'The fire is red. Did Marx invent the fire?'

25. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in C.Nelson and L.Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, London: Macmillan 1988.

26. A key stanza in the poem *Women's Silence* is the following:

We were in the silence

In the unspeakable

In the secret understanding.

Over there on the asphalt

The language whistles by.

- Not ours!

- Not ours!

The silence of women

And the ocean

Encircle the earth.

27. The original intention was that *Woman in the World* should conclude with a theoretical analysis of the project building upon a planned exhibition of all three parts. Confronting works from Skive, Dar es Salaam and Calcutta should enable comparisons and further analyses. As a kind of rehearsal of this, paintings and poems from the projects in Denmark and Tanzania were exhibited together in Oslo in 1986 in connection with the international *Second Feminist Book Fair* and conference, to which I was invited to deliver a report on Swedish infringement of author's rights.

But the funding of the final exhibition and the publication of the project, which were to take place in 1987, was withdrawn at the last moment following the publishing of the critical report from Oslo in the Indian paper *Economic and Political Weekly* (see Press cuttings in supporting documentation for *Woman in the World*). Swedish authorities, that were to sponsor the finalizing of the project, considered my appearance in the internationally spread publication to be 'disloyal'.

CHAPTER 3: UNTIL THE LID IS BLOWN OFF: MODERN ART IN AFRICA

This chapter discusses the research made during the years 1992-2009 on two issues, the genesis of modern art in sub-Saharan Africa and its initial development up to the moment when ‘the lid was blown off’, to quote Marshall Berman, a political philosopher of the end of the colonial period.¹ I give an account of my methodologies, the framings in geography and time of my studies and comment critically on conceptual and terminological distinctions differentiating my writings from most of the Africanist literature of the time, which was to a great extent anthropologically informed. The art historical, historical and philosophical essays and conference papers on the subject that the chapter refers to, constitute the bulk of the published work submitted and formed the ground for subsequent considerations of African cultural trauma. After dealing with issues such as the proposal of a paradigm shift by the pioneering role of the Nigerian painter Aina Onabolu, I conclude the chapter with an overview of the history of African modern artists designed in an hitherto untested way as an arrangement of consecutive and connected generations.

The research was carried out in France, UK, Germany and Belgium, focusing on searching archives, libraries, museums and exhibitions such as *Documenta*, Kassel, *arts from South Africa* at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford (1990, the catalogue) and a temporary exhibition of 20th century African art at the Royal Museum for Central Africa at Tervuren, Brussels. The research also included interviews with African artists in the European diaspora and - with the help of Nicole Guez, *Guide l’Art Africain Contemporain,- Contemporary African Art, a mailing guide*, 1992 - some correspondence with artists in African countries, for instance in Nigeria and Togo. Librarian Janet Stanley at the Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C., provided valuable additional information.

The research into accessible literature on modern African art proved the archival situation generally to be wanting, badly organised and with few writings on a scholarly level. Nevertheless this initial research resulted in a 15 pages text ‘Konst fran Soder om Sahara’ co-authored with art historian Kristian Romare for *Konstperspektiv 3*, 1992.² In

order to establish a network of contacts for further research I sent copies of the magazine together with an English translation of the article to key people in Africa, the US and Europe. (Copy of the translation from 1992 is submitted as submitted essay No.1, bound together with pages of *KonstpERSpektiv* for the sake of illustrations). In its account of the initial research the article prefigured much of my subsequent research.³

Three years later, whilst conducting research in Nigeria and South Africa in preparation for my essay for the exhibition catalogue to *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*.⁴ I found my initial conclusions essentially confirmed. Most disturbing was the lack of an institutional infrastructure concerning visual art, especially in Nigeria despite the fact that the country had the most advanced and active modern art market. Key services such as archives, professional book shops and organised distribution of published texts and images, indispensable for researchers but also for artists wanting to keep in contact with the course of events and position themselves on a 'map of knowledge', were either close to impossible to find or simply nonexistent. It was a handicap that I was later to discuss in my essay *Africa, Art Criticism and the Big Commentary* (1997)⁵, the second of the two papers co-authored with Kristian Romare.

In practical terms it meant that I had to visit the authors and buy documents directly from them, taking the opportunity to interview them. By these means I collected invaluable materials from among others art historian Professor Ola Ololade and artists Uche Okeke, Bruce Onobrakpeya and El Anatsui in Nigeria. In my discussions on sensitive matters such as the evaluation of Ulli Beier's workshop business in the country, conducted with Okeke, Bruce Onobrakpeya and others (see notes 3 and 25), I applied an approach similar to that in *Woman in the World*, conducting the interviews as talks between equally concerned African artists.

In South Africa that was just about to realise that apartheid had been abolished with the elections held the previous year, I had fewer problems of access to materials, as an existing infrastructure for the white art community provided a certain archival service. *Africus*, the first biennial in South Africa (which was to be discontinued after only two editions) was under preparation. At the Johannesburg Art Gallery, I had the opportunity

to study the first retrospective in the country of the modern black pioneer Ernest Mancoba (chpt.5, fig.9 and 11), who was living in Paris, and to discuss it with his biographer Elza Miles and the museum curator Leslie Spiro. The exhibition also included works by his Danish wife Sonja Ferlov. I discussed the importance of the Polly Street Centre in Johannesburg as an alternative art school with its founder, the artist Cecil Skotnes, and also with Professor Elizabeth Rankin and the artist David Koloane, who argued that it nevertheless did not equal the art academies for white South African artists. Koloane was my guide and informant in Johannesburg.

I finally made thorough research at the art collection of the University of Fort Hare, where I interviewed the collector, the anthropologist E.J.Jager, who through the years had brought together the biggest collection in the country of black South African art. He stated that he had made it in order to 'document acculturation'. Fort Hare is located far from the urban centers, and distance matters. Despite the fact that the university collection had been converted to the De Beers Centenary Art Gallery and that I happened to have heard about it before the research journey, knowledge of the Fort Hare collection seemed generally limited among black South African art circles.⁶ As a black person Koloane had not been allowed to visit the museum during apartheid.

From the beginning the research was geographically framed within black sub-Saharan Africa, studied as a coherent entity in all its vastness and extreme diversity, despite the fact that some scholars like V.Y.Mudimbe argue that '(t)here is no such thing as "an" African art'.⁷ It meant among other things leaving out the north of the African continent, which, when it comes to modernisation within visual arts, can be argued to have closer links to the Middle East than to Black Africa.⁸

The time frame of the research was determined by focusing on a straight and consistent narrative of when and where modern art first appeared in Africa and how it developed through colonial and early postcolonial times. Special attention was paid to its earliest chapter through detailed research on and repeated discussion of the role of the Nigerian painter Aina Onabolu, who from the first years of the 20th century represented a new art

in Africa and who preceded and prepared the turn to what is generally thought of as modernism.

Aina Onabolu's decision to become an artist in the new, western sense and to paint portraits and landscapes was taken very early, already in his school age, in revolt against a racially prejudiced statement in a foreign magazine stating that an African is not intellectually capable of producing fine art. He wanted to prove the contrary, and he was strongly supported by his mentor, an eminent African physician, Dr. John Randle, who had experienced a similar bias in the colonial attitudes towards black physicians in Nigeria. The early decision would determine Onabolu's lifetime achievements as a pioneering artist and art educationist.



Fig.1. Page from Aina Onabolu's obituary with reproductions of his portrait of Mrs Spencer Savage 1906 and a study of the nude, c.1940.

He painted his first portraits in the early 20th century and was at the time the only African known to do so. His insistence on the introduction of art classes in secondary schools in Lagos and on professional training of modern artists in Nigeria prepared the way for much of the development of a modern art that was to take place in the country in the 1940s–1960s.⁹ My essay 'The Black Atlantic and the Paradigm Shift to Modern Art in Africa' (2009) was fully devoted to his role and its wider background.¹⁰ I thereby

stressed the influence on the comparatively radical milieu of Lagos with its populations of freed and returning slaves from the progressiveness of a black Atlantic diaspora connected by increasingly modern trade and shipping and with African diaspora cultures cross-fertilising one another. This allowed me to indicate that the genesis of modern art in Africa may after all not, as generally supposed, have been related solely to contacts with Europe but could be seen in the perspective of a much broader, genuinely African process of modernisation over more than a hundred years. Its ideology has been nationalistic and its ultimate aim black African independence. As a radical movement it sooner or later was to find its expression in visual art.

While my research has shown the presence of a strong ideological influence from the pan-African Caribbean author and educationist Edward Wilmot Blyden, who was published in and visited Lagos in the years decisive for Onobolu's decision ¹¹, later studies have pointed to additional inspirations. Basil Davidson mentions in *The Black Man's Burden*, that a consciousness existed among West African literates at Onobolu's time, and perhaps even as early as the late 1860s, about the revolutionary modernisation that took place in Japan in the Meiji era, characterised by a methodical appropriation of everything from the West that could contribute to progress and increased Japanese competitiveness. It proved to Africans, he argues, that a non-white country could compete with the West and even defeat a European power as in the war with Russia in 1905.¹² If, as Davidson's research makes plausible, an awareness of the Japanese example may have inspired thoughts already in James Africanus Horton's *West African Countries and Peoples* (1868) ¹³ it may have played a role in Onobolu's decision to try to compete favourably with European artists. Onobolu's mentor Dr. Randle had studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh at a time when nationalistic and pan-African ideas flourished among African students in the UK, and that may represent another source of inspiration.¹⁴

The significance of Aina Onobolu's historical role has sometimes been questioned and even ignored. Today the artist is often referred to as 'the father of modern African art'.¹⁵

The European mimetic representation that Onobolu appropriated from reproductions in foreign magazines functioned in the African context as a clear marker of the new. In the same way academic realism from Europe – as a convention and as a discipline of artistic training - has marked the turn to an interpretation of modernity in visual art in most parts of the non-western world, where native traditions were invalidated by the pressure of modernisation. This parallel, which indicates that Onobolu belonged to a worldwide historical pattern, has been overlooked in most writings on the artist, something that has contributed to misinterpretations of his role.¹⁶

To penetrate deeper into the nature of the transition from the pre-modern to the modern in African visual production I adopted the concept of a paradigm shift for the change of system that represented a decisive moment towards modern art.¹⁷ Early on in my research I had rehearsed the thought that the adoption of a new art practice, imposed or appropriated, must have meant a totally new socio-cultural formation, one less related to *collective* practices such as rituals and performances of magic and instead building more on *individual* aesthetic contemplation. While the modern ‘field of visual production’, to apply Bourdieu’s model, in the West consists of agents such as art dealers, gallerists, critics and art historians, to mention a few, in Africa pre-colonial visual production was socially integrated and connected to honorary groups such as masquerade organising associations and secret societies and often functioned educationally in everyday life. It delivered, for instance, teaching materials within the rites of passage, the ceremonies marking the entrance into adulthood.

In my interview with Okeke in Nigeria I took up the question what the shift meant in practical terms, and he gave me a very simple explanation. As soon as a school is opened in a traditional village, with the introduction of subjects such as physics, chemistry and geography, the pupils could no longer believe in most of those pre-modern creeds upon which the symbolic meaning of sculptures and masks had built. But before they can become artists in a modern sense, he added, they must be educated and trained in modern thinking.¹⁸

Sylvester Ogbechie, an African scholar who has come close to describing the change as a paradigm shift, emphasizes its character as a process imposed by force when he suggests that we read 'alternative' as 'alter native'. He describes the change as the violent process of altering the views of native societies in order to make them conform to western prescriptions of social and cultural organisation.¹⁹

Among the few references to pre-modern African art perceived as a coherent art system is Basil Davidson's discussion of the importance in pre-modern African societies of symbolic visual objects to a sense of belonging. He stresses that this is valid in all types of societies in sub-Saharan Africa, and he summarises: 'We shall get at an understanding of the arts of Africa only by an arduous effort at grasping the totality of this civilisation'.²⁰ By focusing on what distinguishes different local cultures anthropologists on the other hand have been reluctant to consider comprehensive African patterns, despite the fact that pre-colonial African art in the popular imagination as well as in international art history represents a distinguished chapter.

In researching the history of modern art in Africa, I have been compelled to analyse critically a number of notions and select which to use, considering the excess of vague and questionable terms that figure in the literature on contemporary African art. One such notion is 'contemporary'. It is the preferred term for those writers who programmatically conceive all categories of visual production in 20th century Africa as contemporary without further differentiations. Another notion is 'modern'. Because the distinction between the terms 'contemporary' and 'modern' is pivotal in my research – the former in the sense of generally belonging to the 20th century and the latter in the sense of what Bourdieu, referring to Modernism's refined codes, calls restricted production²¹ – I have stressed the difference between modern African art and phenomena of 'popular', 'tribal' or other 'folksy' visual production with less sophisticated discourses.

So called 'low art' has often been given privileged attention by Africanist writers, while modern art has been treated merely as a subtype of contemporary production and sometimes even been classified as less authentically African. That is why I have chosen

to let ‘contemporary’ signify non-modern 20th century African visual production to keep the distinction clear.

I have avoided interpreting ‘modern’ and ‘Modernism’ in an African context as meaning any kind of visual production linked to a general social and technological modernisation or as phenomena existing in ‘modern time’. This would imply academic realism and on an unsophisticated level also mass production of tourist art. It means, for instance, that I have chosen to describe Onobolu’s contribution not as representing an early African Modernism but as a decisive step towards Modernism.

As already indicated, I prefer to define modern art in African contexts by three criteria. It represents a departure from a pre-colonial functional system of visual production, a departure that often may count for a specific African dimension. It connects to and builds on modern art discourses, which from being European and western have become globally shared. And it provides objects for aesthetical consumption to an exclusive modern art market. (See Introduction, note 1). While, according to terminological practices in the West, Modernism is sometimes classified as an art historical period preceding Postmodernism and Contemporary Art²² – thereby in time coinciding with the period of colonialism in Africa – I have preferred to conceive modern art in Africa as an ongoing project.

The blurring of categories seems to be a problem specific to the African context.²³ For instance, India is in no way less rich in popular and tribal art. But writers on art in India generally avoid confusing categories, ‘keeping up the tension in the high-low binary’, as Geeta Kapur puts it.²⁴ I have also critically discussed the notion ‘traditional’, which figures in the terminological confusion about African art, preferring only to use the term in references to ‘pre-colonial and traditional art’, where the distinction is not of primary interest.²⁵ According to the definition upon which my research has built and to the concept of a paradigm shift, in which the changeover means to connect to discourses of modern art, a modern African artist is basically defined as an artist working in an intellectually informed way - whether trained in art schools or self-educated.²⁶

My critique of anthropological theory and its strains of structuralism in dealing with African art has been at its harshest when it comes to the conceptual relations between visual art and culture. I have principally argued against the reduction of visual art works to reflections or expressions of a cultural structure. This reduction deprives the work of art of its dimension as a specific act of an individual visual art practitioner. Recently a new thinking on anthropology and art has emerged within the anthropological discipline, which confirms many of my reservations.²⁷

Terry Eagleton indicates another relation within culture between collective and individual: 'Culture is a form of universal subjectivity at work within each of us'.²⁸ But even a less balanced interpretation than his can be questioned in an African context. Frantz Fanon, a uniquely sensitive socio-diagnostic psychiatrist who observed colonialism's impact on culture, interprets the relation between individuals and culture in a much tougher way. He talks of the colonial era in Africa as 'a period of regular and important mental pathology'.²⁹ How does an oppressed people behave, he asks? 'We witness the destruction of cultural values. Of ways of life, language, dress, techniques are devalorized'. And he concludes: 'The cultural mummification leads to a mummification of individual thinking'.³⁰

I shall return to these aspects in a concluding chapter on black African cultural trauma and its relation to modern African art. Here I shall discuss what I have perceived throughout the research – and not only against that traumatising background - as the extraordinary individual drama implied in every case where an African ventures into modern art. The practice of modern art implied a new level of subject formation and autonomous individual expression. A modern artist represented a completely unfamiliar species according to social conventions.³¹ We have also to take into account the enduring lack of adequate infrastructure, market and patronage. Consequently, did the decision to challenge the views of a not yet receptive audience include among its prerequisites an extraordinarily strong subjectivity and self-consciousness?

There are many examples of artists who had to give up their career, not least among black women artists. For instance, the Kenyan sculptor Rosemary Karuga, who was

trained at the Makerere University College Art School in Kampala, Uganda, was forced to resign from her artistic career to earn her living as a school teacher, later on to return as a pensioner to produce collages from cheap materials³², while the South African expressionist painter Gladys Mgudlandlu insisted on painting her poetic visions by night in spite of severe drawbacks.³³

That the individuality characteristic of modern art practice expressed by many African modernists was distrusted by both the general public and governments is suggested by the fact that they were among the first to be forced into exile by political change: for example the Sudanese Ibrahim El Salahi and the Ethiopians Skunder Boghossian (fig.5) and Gebre Kristos Desta (submitted essay No.12, 111). Even political patronage and promotion have in some cases been a mask for control.³⁴

The fact of working in isolation has been a hurdle, only slowly eased as infrastructure was developed and an educated domestic audience emerged. The governments of several African countries, at first the colonial ones but then governments of independent countries, seem to have been willing to invest in establishing basic educational art institutions in the form of art academies and art schools. They have to a lesser extent invested in building an infrastructure necessary for developing an environment with institutions and audiences able to support graduated artists. Among the reasons for this, as I have suggested, was a general downturn of African economies.

But one conclusion is that art schools in this African context of tardy art markets and lack of a responsive audience have constituted and in some countries continue to constitute important islands of a more advanced attitude to artistic thinking, ambitions and ways of production. Maintaining art markets presumes a knowledgeable middleclass, and the development of such a class sufficient to be socially effective was, as Fanon has pointed out, delayed by colonialism. The history of establishing art academies is consequently central to the history of modern African art.³⁵



Fig 2. The Art academy in Abidjan, in the 1970s when Christian Lattier was teaching and the Vohu-Vohu Group studying there.

An aim of the research has been to provide examples of varying intersections between wider historical conditions, local situations and individual trajectories in order to try to elucidate determining factors behind the development of a modern art in Africa. The main difficulties, as I have emphasised, have been the extreme scarcity of thoroughly researched monographs on modern African artists and, until recently, a corresponding scarcity of detailed art historical field research, with the outstanding exception of Marshall W. Mount's extensive research during the 1960s.³⁶

An example of what has been missing until recently is the monograph by Sylvester Ogbachie on the Nigerian pioneer artist Ben Enwonwu.³⁷ It narrates how an African artist during the colonial period was picked up through initiatives by the colonial authorities, first to be trained in Nigeria and then to be further schooled within art institutions in Britain, and subsequently to be promoted by the authorities as representing proof of allegedly progressive colonial policies.

A recent example of serious and methodologically modern field research is represented by the study *Art and the End of Apartheid* by the American art historian John Pepper.³⁸ It provides factual and detailed insight into how black South African artists, severely discriminated against by the apartheid regime, symbolically fought for freedom and democracy through their art and how art practices in some cases produced 'grey areas' between segregated white and black zones, where artists could meet and collaborate across the colour bar. As the history of art by black artists under apartheid represents an

illustrative chapter of white (colonial) cultural oppression, I will come back to Pepper's study as a valuable source in Chapter Five.

These recent studies contribute a more clear understanding of how conditions for modern black African artists changed in Nigeria and in South Africa from the early modernist period, when Aina Onabolu had to fight the colonial authorities for every step forward, and to Ben Enwonwu's use of diplomacy at least partly for his own artistic purposes. Enwonwu's negotiating a western habitus took place in the same period, the 1930s-40s, in which the pioneering South African artists Gerard Sekoto and Ernest Mancoba concluded that they had to migrate to Paris (fig.4 and chpt.5, fig.9-11).³⁹

South Africa had a 20th century history in many ways distinct from that of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Having fought with the Allies during the Second World War, it shared a brief period of post-war liberalism, which brought an influx of ideas and progressive immigrants from Europe. One result was the setting up of a vital workshop, the Polly Street Centre in Johannesburg, where several important black modernist artists received training.⁴⁰



Fig.3, Sidney Kumalo.,
Two Bulls, bronze 1975,
De Beers Centenary Art
Gallery, Fort Hare, S.A.

In 1948 the National Party came to power in South Africa. The liberal interregnum was over and an apartheid system was implemented as official politics with race laws touching every aspect of social life. The following decades of increasingly brutal apartheid saw desperate conditions for black artists, several of whom, according to

Steven Sack, died or went into exile or became severely traumatised.⁴¹ An important part of black visual production was engaged with the black resistance directed by ANC. The elections in 1994, marking the end of official apartheid, can in some respects be seen as corresponding to the moment of independence in other parts of Africa which released a spirit of self-consciousness and creativity among black African artists, only in South Africa a moment delayed by some thirty years.

In order to facilitate a parallel reading of the contributions by African artists in different parts of the continent during the ‘classical’ period of modern art on which I have focused, I have found it useful to relate generational groups to significant periods, thereby disregarding stylistic differences.⁴² In the earliest generation, more or less of the same era as the imperialism unleashed by the Berlin Conference 1884-85,⁴³ we find Aina Onabolu (1882-1963) in Nigeria (Introduction fig.1, chpt. 3, fig.1, submitted essay No.14,3) and Ibrayima Njoya (c:a 1880-1966), who was active in the Bamoun kingdom in Cameroon. They had completely different pathways to art and different scopes of influence, the former connected to progressive Pan-African aspirations and laying the foundations of a modern art in West Africa, the latter commissioned by the Bamoun ruler, his relative, to invent a Bamoun version of modern art, which was to remain local.⁴⁴

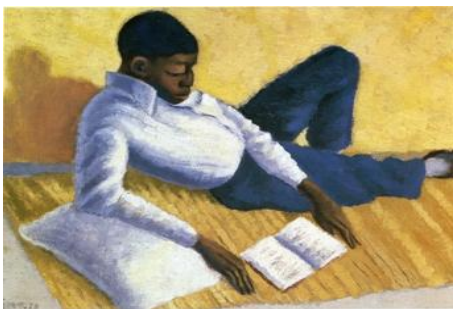


Fig 4, Gerard Sekoto, *Portrait of a Young Man Reading*, oil on canvas 1946-47, Gerard Sekoto Foundation.

Among a later generation of artists, that became active in the interwar period, the already mentioned South African artists Ernest Mancoba (1904-2002) and Gerard Sekoto (1913-93) found their own route to modern art without any institutional support, while both Ghanaian Oku Ampofo (1908-98) and Nigerian Ben Enwonwu (1921-94)

made official careers after sponsored studies abroad.⁴⁵ Back in Ghana Ampofo became chairman of the Ghanaian Arts Council, while in Nigeria Enwonwu was elected adviser to the colonial government (for Enwonwu see chpt. 5, fig.12).

Several artists of the generation born in the 1920s became influential teachers at the art schools established in African countries: Vincent Kofi (1923-71) in Ghana and Gregory Maloba (b 1922), Sam Ntiro (1923-94) and Elimu Njau (b 1923) at the Makerere University College Art School in Kampala, Uganda.⁴⁶ In Ivory Coast, Christian Lattier (1925-78) was an influential teacher to the so called Vohou-Vohou group of students working with informal abstraction (for Lattier see submitted essay No.12,12, and for a Vohu-Vohu artist see Submitted essay No.1, front cover of the Swedish original), inspiring them to use locally available materials such as sand and sackcloth.⁴⁷ In Senegal, Iba N'Diaye (1928-2008) was summoned by the Negritude philosopher and president Leopold Senghor to teach at the academy when it was opened on the country's independence. He remained there as a teacher until a dominating Negritude inspired primitivism, which he opposed, drove him back to Paris, where he had made his original artistic career.⁴⁸ The artists of this generation were in their forties when the majority of African countries in the 1960s became independent, which means that they had made an essential part of their contributions during a dying colonialism.

The following generation arrived at the point of independence: these were young upcoming artists, several of them just graduating from domestic art academies. Among them were in Nigeria the important group called the Zaria Rebels, foremost among them being Uche Okeke (b 1933), Demas Nwoko (b 1935), Yusuf Grillo (b 1934) and Bruce Onobrakpeya (b 1932)⁴⁹ (submitted essay No.1, 21 and 22), in Sudan Ibrahim El-Salahi (b 1930) and Ahmed Shibrain (b 1931) and in South Africa Sidney Kumalo (1935-88), Ezrom Legae (1938-99) and Dumile Feni (1942-91) – (for Kumalo see fig.3 and submitted essay No.12, 113; for Legae see Introduction, fig.2 and chpt.5, fig. 4 and 5).

Before attempting some stylistic characterisations of these generations of modern African artists I shall venture a general observation. They can seldom be classified by reference to any specific model, school or ism in the West or elsewhere, even if there

may be plenty of points in common. The interest in modern forms is often combined – in an awareness of points of departure in the past - with investigations into some local African art historical tradition, individual expressions being developed between the two sources of inspiration. Examples are the Sudanese artists Ibrahim El Salahi and Osmar Waqialla with their references to Islamic calligraphy and the Ethiopians Gebre Kristos Desta and Skunder Boghossian, to whose background in Coptic icons may be added references to abstract expressionism in the former and to the abstract and surreal art of Klee, Matta and Wifredo Lam in the latter case. It would be misleading to characterise their art by referring to just one of those creative influences.



Fig.5. Skunder Boghossian, *Viet Man*

This kind of working with the polarity of modernity and tradition was carried out as a conscious method of producing locally embedded modernism by the Nigerian art students in Zaria, the so called Zaria Rebels. Uche Okeke, the theoretician of the group, called in a manifesto the approach ‘Natural Synthesis’.⁴⁹ Modern art provided according to him an instrumental freedom to transform local popular traditions that were still alive into modern expressions with a distinct African diction. Each artist could use his regional visual dialect to produce an identifiably African modern art for independent Nigeria. After the Biafran civil war this pan-Nigerian ambition became politically obsolete.⁵⁰

The conscious strategism characterising Okeke’s manifesto distinguishes it from a generally more unconscious approach among African modernist artists for whom departure and aims seem to have been more intuitively perceived. The question of the

unconscious and the conscious in art has been discussed not at least in relation to psychoanalysis and Surrealism.⁵¹ But as the English anthropologist, linguist, semiotician and cyberneticist Gregory Bateson wrote, ‘in truth, our life is such that its unconscious components are continuously present in all their multiple forms.’⁵²

Works of visual art, he stated, contain a kind of message that would be falsified if communicated in words, because the use of words (other than poetry) would imply that it is about a fully conscious and voluntary message. To Bateson the unconscious is a basic component in art as well as in dreams, myth and religion. It even represents a phenomenon unaided by which a mere purposive rationality becomes pathogenic and destructive to life. His analysis comes closer to how I perceive the unconscious as a component in African art, pre-modern and modern.

In earlier generations some artists in different African countries had argued against connecting to African traditions, to mention in Ghana Vincent Kofi and in Uganda Gregory Maloba. They argued for an African artist to be free to appropriate from any art in the world, contemporary or historical.⁵³ A similar view was supported by the Senegalese artist Iba N’Diaye, who considered any deliberate ‘Africanisation’ to be a humiliating compliance with western expectations.⁵⁴

At the time of independence much of what had been impeded under colonial rule exploded into new and self-confident activities. “When the lid is blown off, the modernist spirit is one of the first things to come out, it is the return of the repressed”, writes Marshall Berman,⁵⁵ and the American art historian Marshall W. Mount, who made his extensive field studies during the dynamic 1960s, the decade of independence, notes that ‘Africa is currently undergoing transformation at a speed unequalled in the history of civilization’.⁵⁶ The Sixties and Seventies represent the highlight of the historical development of a modern art in Africa, which is where my research has been concentrated.

The subsequent deterioration of economic and political conditions - that occurred during the neo-colonial era - cannot undo the light thrown upon the peak of the history of

modern African art by the appreciative observations of these two knowledgeable scholars. But my research compels me to turn the perspective round. Their statements testify indirectly to the heavy weight of the colonial oppression and to the deep cultural trauma, which combined to obstruct and slow down progress and to delay the flourishing and full expression of an modern African spirit in visual art, until the colonial lid was blown off and transformations began to unfold at an unprecedented pace.

Endnotes

1. Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air. The Experience of Modernity*, New York: Simon & Schuster 1982, 125. Interestingly enough the sentence ‘it is the return of the repressed’, that the author uses about African modernism, can be interpreted as a direct quotation from Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, where it refers to a historical trauma.

2. ‘Konst fran soder om Sahara’, (Art from South of Sahara), *Konstperspektiv* 3/92, Malmoe, Sweden, 1992. Co-author Kristian Romare. Republished in *Yang*, Ghent, Belgium 1993, as ‘Kunst bezuiden de Sahara’.

3. The essay opened with graphic examples of how the international conditions and the development of modern African art were impeded by a lack of interest, competence and knowledge among established European agents in the field of art. This was a subject to which I was going to return in several of my essays, as I think it should not be overlooked as representing a negative factor in a general evaluation of African modern art.

The essay paid particular attention to two exhibitions: Documenta 9 in Kassel, in which African art was represented for the first time; and *Naissance de la peinture contemporaine en Afrique centrale, 1930-1970* (March-May 1992) at The Royal Museum for Central Africa at Tervuren outside Brussels. The Belgian curator of Documenta 9, Jan Hoet, who had been sharply challenged from several quarters including myself, for neglecting and publically dismissing modern African art as non-existent, at the last moment selected two hardly known African artists, Ousmane Sow and Mo Edoga (for illustrations concerning this part see submitted essay No.1). About where he had been turning to find representative modern artists I wrote, that ‘(i)nstead of searching in vital milieus in Africa and in the diaspora, Hoet chose two who, when looking around in Europe, had been taken by the fancy to try their hand at art. One physiotherapist and one medic’. Neither the imitations of Rodin by the former nor the junk sculpture of the latter had anything to do with aesthetics or trends within modern African art. My negative evaluation of their production has been confirmed by the fact that they have played no significant role in what has subsequently been professionally acknowledged as African modern art.

I characterised the museum at Tervuren as ‘a haunted castle reminding us of the colonial era with machine guns, khaki uniforms, stuffed animals and “Negro masks”’. It had been established by making

permanent the main building of a former colonial world exhibition, and its public attitude to Africa was and remains outmoded and neo-colonial. The catalogue of the temporary exhibition argued that ‘modern’ art emerged in Africa around 1930, specifically referring to a former house painter, Lubaki, who had been encouraged by colonial officials to paint on paper – watercolours that they exhibited in the West – and who had then disappeared from sight.

The exhibition was historically misinformed and was in part connected to a Eurocentric historiography that assigns a disproportionate role in the development of African modernism to workshop activities initiated by European amateur teachers such as Pierre Romain-Defosses in Elisabethville (then Belgian Congo), Pierre Lods in Brazzaville and Ulli Beier in Oshogbo, Nigeria. Their common approach was to discover painters of allegedly natural talent among servants and other uneducated Africans, and to launch them as ‘authentically African’, ultimately causing problems in the international perception of the nature of modern African art, to which I was to return in several essays.

As historiography the claims by the Tervuren exhibition about when a new kind of art first emerged in Africa could easily be corrected by the fact that, already in the early years of the 20th century in Nigeria, Onobolu took the decisive step towards a modern art by appropriating from Europe an academically informed mimetic representation in easel paintings and portraiture. I was to come back to his seminal role in many of my essays. In *Konstperspektiv* I took it as the point of departure for drafting an alternative history of modern African art.

This alternative history was to include the role of the art school at the Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda; the discussion between revivalists and internationalists in for instance Ghana; Negritude and President Senghor’s art policy in Senegal; the so called Zaria Rebels, who questioned European curricula in art academies in Nigeria; and, in francophone Africa, the support from the influential circle in Paris around the publication *Presence Africaine*.

I reminded the reader about the economic depression, the ‘sandstorm’ that ruined much of what was hoped for at the moment of independence, a setback that occurred in interaction with a persistent racially motivated repudiation in the West of African intellectual and aesthetic achievements, as noted by Carl Einstein. I researched the background to this preconceived attitude by studying the exhibition *Wit over Zwart*, an exhibition originally organised by the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and shown at the Socio-Cultural Centre De Markten in Brussels April-June 1991. Its revealing inventory of western racist imagery about Blacks, the extent of which I could never have imagined, was a theme to be further elaborated by Jan Nederveen Pietersee in *White on Black. Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, New Haven and London 1992.

In *Konst fran Soder om Sahara* I finally inserted several reminders of how easily well established biases can interfere in the discussion on modern African art and connected issues. Accounting for the difficult situation of modern black artists in apartheid South Africa I warned for instance that certain misconceptions flourishing in the western discourse of multiculturalism such as thoughtlessly levelling the opposition between ‘high’ and ‘low’ art in fact could be seen as corresponding to racially biased discourses among the white minority concerning black South African popular art and folklore, whose celebration confirmed their view of ‘cultural inferiority’.

4. Evelyn Nicodemus, 'Inside.Outside' in *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London 1995, 29-36.
5. Evelyn Nicodemus, 'Africa, Art Criticism and the Big Commentary'. *Third Text* no 41, 1997-98, 53-65. Co-author Kristian Romare
6. This fact struck me as odd considering that Fort Hare University is the university where for instance Nelson Mandela had been studying in the Twenties and the pioneering black artist Ernest Mancoba studied in the Thirties. Most of my interviewees in South Africa had not seen the art collection, even not Cesil Skotnes. Part of the explanation is probably that when it was created during apartheid, all from the Sixties-Seventies, it was conceived by its originator E.J.Jager in terms of anthropological documentation rather than in terms of an art collection. This circumstance seems finally not to have changed until it in 1988 was housed in the new museum building at Fort Hare, De Beers Centenary Art Gallery. David Koloane informed me about the rule during apartheid that black South Africans were not allowed to visit art museums if not as attendants to white visitors..
7. V.Y.Mudimbe, "'Reprendre": Enunciations and Strategies in Contemporary African Arts', in Susan Vogel. *Africa Explores. 20 Century African Art*, New York, Munich: The Center for African Arts, Prestel 1991, 276. In my essay 'Inside.Outside' I argued for a coherent approach. A traumatic history of black slavery and a shared experience of colonialism and decolonisation constitute the main common background of the course of events of an artistic modernisation in sub-Saharan Africa. From an art historical point of view they represent a basic factor that connects the majority of the different countries and regions in Black Africa. I also referred to the parallel and simultaneous influence from major events on the world scene such as World War I and II on the development in widely separate parts of the African continent
8. In his essay 'Modern African Art' Chika Okeke chose to treat 'the entire continent, from the Maghreb to Southern Africa to Africa West and East'. It enabled him to point to the fact that the first art school on the continent was established in Cairo by Prince Yusef Kamal as early as 1908. But the examples of modern painting that he reproduced by Algerian Rachmid Koraichi and Moroccan Ahmed Cherkaoui, both artists who made their career in the West, do not convince the reader that the northern chapter must be included in what we generally mean with 'modern African art'. Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *The Short Century, Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994*, Munich, London, New York: Prestel 2001, 29,
9. My analysis of Onobolu's key contributions, drafted in the essay 'Konst fran Soder om Sahara' (1992) was developed in the essays 'Bourdieu out of Europe?' (1994), 'Inside. Outside' (1995), 'Out of Invisibility' (1999) and 'Representing African Art' (2001) and was deepened and partly revised in the essay 'The Black Atlantic and the Paradigm Shift to Modern Art in Africa' (2009),
10. Evelyn Nicodemus, 'The Black Atlantic and the paradigm shift to modern art in Africa', *Critical Interventions. Journal of African art history and visual culture*, no 3-4, 2009. Aachron, California, USA.
11. Ibid. 16.
12. Basil Davidson *The Black Man's Burden. Africa and the Curse of the Nation State*. New York: Times Books 1992, 40.

13. James Africanus Horton (1835-83), a black African physician, officer and political thinker who lived and worked in Sierra Leone and was born there as the son of a freed slave and who graduated from Edinburgh in 1859, published in 1868 *West African Countries and Peoples*, in which he contested theories of white racial superiority.

14. Information given to the author by Marika Sherwood, University of London, at the conference *Africa in Scotland, Scotland in Africa* in Edinburgh 2008, where she presented a paper on Pan-Africanist writings and activism in the Anglophone world.

15. The popular expression 'father of African modernism' has lately popped up on the Internet. While Onobolu in Oladehinde Agoro's unpublished thesis on the artist (1980) was credited as 'the father of modern Nigerian art', the South African publisher David Krut posted in 2006 a text by Amy Millar, where Onobolu is presented as 'a ground-breaking African Modernist'. <http://www.davidkrutpublishing.com/dkp/latest/2006/08/picasso-and-africa-a-living-dialogue-by-amy-millar>.

That it took time for a full recognition of the role of Onobolu is illustrated by the fact that Marshall W. Mount in his account on African art since 1920 (1973) surprisingly omits to mention him and further by the fact that a second academic thesis on the artist, this time by Professor Ola Oloidi, also has remained unpublished. Oloidi's thesis was recorded in a bibliography that I obtained from the author but is not even mentioned in Bernice M. Kelly and Janet Stanley (ed), *Nigerian Artists: A Who's Who and Bibliography*, London, Melbourne, Munich, New York 1993, in which data on Onobolu significantly occupy only one page while those on for instance Bruce Onobrakpeya occupy nearly twelve pages.

16. In my essay 'The Centre of Otherness', in J. Fisher (ed.) *Global Visions towards a New Internationalism in Visual Arts*, Kala Press 1994, 96, I wrote: 'The dull Eurocentric thought cannot imagine that the so much despised academic realism can be used as a tool of the avant-garde.' John Clark in *Modern Asian Art* is likewise critical about the ignorance among western art historians of the role academic realism has played in non-western cultures. After noting that '(t)he visual styles of realism, the technique of oil painting, the teaching institutions of the mid to late nineteenth century art school, the social mediation practice of artists' exhibitions and fine art salons, were all transferred to and institutionalised within many parts of Asia between the 1850s and the 1930s', he writes that '(w)ith academy realism, artists were privileged as interpreters of the new because of its different cultural origination.' John Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 1998), 16. And Partha Mitter writes 'The advent of academic naturalism during the colonial era was the first great revolutionary break in India that profoundly transformed art institutions, practices, patronages, genres, materials, as well as artistic style from the flat two-dimensional pictures to illusionist naturalism.' Partha Mitter, 'Decentring Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery', *The Art Bulletin* Volume XC No 4 2008, 23.

While as mentioned I do not want to categorise Onobolu as a modernist, I perceive his turning to a new paradigm as the decisive step in Africa towards a modern art. From the point of view of European art history, the moment of modernism is mainly considered to occur when artists turn away from a rigid academic realism taught in art academies in order to experiment with new modes. By uncritically taking

over this European view in their art historical analyses and mixing up the two steps, several African scholars as well as their western colleagues have had obvious difficulties in acknowledging the role of Onobolu as a pioneer, instead classifying him as old-fashioned.

17. The term 'paradigm shift' was originally coined in 1962 by Thomas Kuhn in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* to describe a change in basic presumptions within the ruling theory of science. It has since been widely applied to many other realms of human experiences describing major shifts of mind-set or perspective. Within art theory in the West it has been somewhat differently employed in Europe and in the US, in the latter case by many used to indicate a new chapter represented by Minimalism and Pop Art, in Europe sometimes applied to the shift to modern art and sometimes to the role of Cubism and Dada but perhaps most convincingly to evaluate the wide influence of Marcel Duchamp's thinking on art, displacing focus from production to idea and the viewer's response to the artist's proposition. The Western paradigm shift in art represents a conceptual change within an existing and persisting system, while the paradigm shift from pre-modern to modern visual production in Africa, as I suggest, represents a radical change of system.

18. My interview with Professor Uche Okeke included a discussion on the manifold existence of African artists neither 'traditional' nor 'modern', by some scholars called 'transitional'. They do not represent any transition, Okeke explained, they are orphans of a tradition made obsolete. It was in that context that he delivered his down to earth definition of the shift.

Prompted by that discussion I included the notion 'paradigm shift' in my review of two exhibitions in 1995, *Africa: The Art of a Continent* at the Royal Academy of Arts, London (of pre-colonial art) and *Seven Stories about modern art in Africa* at Whitechapel Art Gallery. I called the essay 'Art and Art from Africa. The Two Sides of the Gap'. I described the dilemma of an art emerging in the interval between the two paradigms, not yet informed by the modern intellectual discourses but no longer strengthened by being an integral part of the pre-modern system. What has complicated the situation of the art within the gap is that it has been subjected to biased interpretations by western market interests and claimed to represent the 'authentic' contemporary African art. Evelyn Nicodemus, 'Art and Art from Africa. The Two Sides of the Gap'. *Third Text* no 33 1995, 96. If the concept of the paradigm shift has been tardy in being taken up within literature on African art, it is probably because both modern western art practice and pre-modern African visual practice are seldom described in terms of specific systems or paradigms.

19 Sylvester Ogbechie, 'The Perils of Unilateral Power: Neomodernist Metaphors and the New Global Order' in T.Smith, O.Enwezor and N.Conger (eds), *Antinomies of Art and Culture. Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (Durham, London: Duke University Press 2008), 179.

20. Basil Davidson, *The African Genius. An Introduction to African Social and Cultural History*, Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company 1969, 160.

21. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production. Essays on Art and Literature*, Cambridge: Polity Press 1993, 15.

22. My recent cooperation with the American art historian Professor Elaine O'Brien, California State University, Sacramento, on a textbook for undergraduates, *Modern Art in Africa, Asia and Latin America: An Introduction to Global Modernisms* (to be published by Blackwell in 2011), for which I

have edited and introduced the African section, was preceded by long discussions on periodization. According to her, a conventional periodization in American academia divides up recent art history into Modernist, Post-modern and Contemporary periods.

23. In the catalogue *Africa Explores. 20th Century African Art* (1991) the American art historian Susan Vogel tried to establish a new framework for the multiplicity and variety of 20th century African art. If her intention was to bring some order into the terminological confusion in Africanist literature, what she apparently managed to do was to add to it with the partly made up titles of the strains according to which she organised the exhibition. She used terms such as 'new functional art', 'extinct art', 'urban art' and 'international art'.

The exhibition *Africa Remix: The Contemporary Art of a Continent* (2004), curated by Simon Njami, Jean-Hubert Martin and others, was organised around three categories, 'City and Land', 'Body and Soul' and 'Identity and History'. Critically commenting on what he calls a curatorial challenge that still remains unresolved, Anthony Downey points to an immanent concern that the artists included 'are being made to answer to a politics of identity that reduces their work to the *a priori* demands of cultural theory'. Avoiding the sensitive question on 'high' and 'low' art, he blames 'a curatorial legislative manner' and 'narrow institutional edicts' for a categorisation that represents an 'interpretative prescriptiveness'. Anthony Downey, 'Curating Africa: Africa Remix and the Categorical Dilemma', *Wasafiri* 46, 2005, 47-55.

An even more systematic confusion than that staged by Vogel was represented by the richly illustrated survey *Art Africain Contemporain*, Paris: Editions Cercle d'Art 1991, an omnium varium by Pierre Gaudibert, former director of Musée des arts africains et océaniens in Paris (now succeeded by Musée du quai Branly), with whom I was briefly in correspondence. The survey enumerates around three hundred contemporary visual artists of sub-Saharan Africa, in most cases without specifying where or in what historical context they were or had been working. I could establish that it was hardly a reliable source. In one case, where I could make a first hand check of its veracity, an artist (Everlyn Nicodemus) was on one page said to originate from Zimbabwe and on another page to be Tanzanian. Though Gaudibert categorised the enumeration into a chapter of 'scholarly' painting (peinture 'savante') and another chapter of popular painting and sculpture, he nevertheless made a virtue of mixing the categories.

24. Geeta Kapur, 'A Cultural Conjunction in India: Art into Documentary' in T. Smith et al (eds.) *Modernity. Postmodernity. Contemporaneity* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2008), 48

25. Picasso has asserted that for him, when it came to study the plastic features of African figures and masks, it was of no importance if the objects were authentic pre-colonial works or recent mass-produced copies. In similar cases, where the distinction is not relevant, I have used the more sliding designation 'pre-colonial and traditional'. For the rest I have tried to avoid the term 'traditional'.

26. This definition is reflected in my research as a principal repudiation of certain European manipulated workshop activities and of a well organised western marketing of a kind of naïve, uneducated African picture production emanating from the Poto Poto School, the Oshogbo workshop and other similar hothouses of amateur products propagated as 'authentic African'. These had a contaminating impact on the course of 20th century African visual production. I have further been able to document, in interviews

with among others professor Uche Okeke in Nigeria, how it drove young educated and trained modern African artists out of the market. It occurred at a moment – around independence - when finding outlets for their art in more advanced foreign markets would have been vital for the development of modern art in Africa. And a certain powerful European art collector activity, primitivising in an anti-intellectual way and inspired by a negative side of the exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* in Paris 1989, has been subjected to even sharper criticism in essays and conference papers in my research. The distorting influence of the Pigozzi Collection and its curator Andre Magnin through exhibitions and publications is today stronger than ever.

27. When in 2008 I was invited by anthropologist Professor Jeremy MacClancy to give an account of my critique of anthropological approaches towards modern African art before a seminar at Oxford Brookes University, I found a profound consciousness about the problems shared between students and teacher. The anthology H.Morphy & M.Perkins (eds) *The Anthropology of Art. A Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2006, documents tendencies to a new thinking on the subject and contains an exceptionally farsighted and sensitive essay by the British visual anthropologist, social scientist, linguist, semiotician and cyberneticist Gregory Bateson on art as a message about certain parts of the unconsciousness, which he calls 'Style, Grace, and Information in Primitive Art' (1973). He argues for instance that consciousness 'unaided by such phenomena as art, religion, dreams and the like is necessarily pathogenic and destructive of life' (87).

28, Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2000, 8.

29. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Penguin Books, 1985, 181.

30. Frantz Fanon in 'Racism and Culture', speech held before The First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists, Paris 1956 and published in *Presence Africaine*.

31. When in a correspondence in 1992 I interviewed an officially established sculptor in Lome, Togo, Paul Ahyi (submitted essay No.1, English translation 12-13), he stressed that his profession as teacher – he was professor at a high school of architecture - was of importance to his public identity. Without it he would not be taken seriously, he explained, as his compatriots generally perceived artists as 'odd dreamers'.

32. Rosemary Karuga (b 1928), with whom I had a correspondence in 1992 and whom I wrote about in 'Konst Soder om Sahara', reached in the beginning of the Nineties an American audience for her collages after an exhibition at Studio Museum in Harlem.

33. Gladys Mgudlandlu (1925-1979), who lost quite a part of her production in a fire, was despite apartheid supported by a white audience in Cape Town and paid attention to in the press. See Elza Miles, *Nomfanekiso who paints at night. The art of Gladys Mgudlandlu*, Vlaeberg, SA: Fernwood Press 2007.

34. For instance, the Tanzanian artist Sam Ntiro, who studied and taught at the Makerere University College Art School and who opened my first exhibition in Dar es Salaam in 1980, questioned whether his election as Tanzanian high commissioner in London was a promotion or a device to keep him out of the way.

35. The establishment of art schools and art academies in African countries was exemplarily researched in Marshall W.Mount, *African Art. The Years since 1920* (1973). They mainly slavishly followed the pattern

of European art educational institutions, at least at the beginning. What Mount overlooks are interesting examples of African students questioning the curricula and even taking over as teachers in for instance Zaria in Nigeria, at the Makerere University College Art School in Kampala, and at the Polly Street Centre in Johannesburg.

Early art schools and academies were established in the 1940s-1950s with some few preceding initiatives: the Kumasi University Art School in Ghana with an origin in 1936 and the Makerere University College Art School in Kampala, Uganda, originally started as a workshop by Margaret Trowell in 1937. In 1946 the School of Fine and Applied Art was established in Khartoum, Sudan; what became the Ahmadou Bello University Art Department in Zaria, Nigeria, had started in Ibadan in 1953; in 1957 Dakar in Senegal got its Ecole des Arts and Addis Ababa in Ethiopia its Fine Arts School, while the Institut Nationale des Arts was established in 1966 in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

36. Marshall W. Mount, *African Art. The Years since 1920*, New York: Da Capo Press 1989.

37. Sylvester Ogbechie, *Ben Enwonwu. The Making of an African Modernist*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press 2008. With a richness of biographical, local and historical facts Ogbechie documents the prejudiced western resistance to any acknowledgment of an African modernism at the time. He shows how Enwonwu negotiated an African modernity hand in hand with western instruction and also how he used his position to exhibit internationally, thereby raising the standing of modern African art. Ogbechie's detailed account of the artist's childhood and youth provides valuable insight into the transition from old traditions to new attitudes.

38. John Pepper, *Art and the End of Apartheid* Minneapolis. London: University of Minnesota Press 2009.

39. Finding themselves in a country with no opportunities whatsoever in artistic training for black South Africans, Gerard Sekoto and Ernest Mancoba had taken advantage of the fact that black teachers in schools for black children were given basic instructions in drawing and painting, so that they could produce their own visual teaching materials. These were skills they decided to bring to bear in their careers as modern artists.

In Europe, Mancoba, who had emigrated from South Africa before the Second World War, made contact with the Danish-Belgian-Dutch avant-garde group COBRA and, by combining African aesthetics and modernist sensibility, produced works that have been critically judged as innovative and situated at the international frontline.

Sekoto remained in South Africa during the war. In a figurative style, informed by white South African Postimpressionism, he depicted in his paintings the townships around Johannesburg, to which black rural manpower was brought by a booming war industry. He painted with extraordinary empathy black workers packed together in local trains and barracks for labourers. It had been a common bias that black South Africans, thought to be by nature rural, were not fit for urban life, but this was refuted, as Nelson Mandela observes in his autobiography, by the ongoing demographic change, which for the Blacks represented a double process of being brutally exploited and gaining self-respect. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, London: Little, Brown and Company 1994, 71.

Having followed in the footsteps of Mancoba to Paris after the war, Sekoto kept contact with the struggle in South Africa, where his works were exhibited and where he became a role model for younger black artists. Hardened apartheid politics forced both of them to remain in exile for the rest of their lives.

40. What became known as Polly Street Centre was founded in 1952 as a biweekly art studio at the Adult Non-European Recreation Centre on Polly Street in Johannesburg and led by Cecil Skotnes, an artist of Norwegian descent who, born in South Africa 1926, fought in the Second World War. Some of the students at Polly Street Centre, such as Sidney Kumalo and Ezrom Legae, became assistants to Skotnes and even took over teaching and directing the centre. Having been introduced to pre-colonial African sculpture from West and Central Africa by the German immigrant art dealer and collector Egon Guenther, these artists integrated abstraction into their art in a way similar to that of European Primitivist artists forty years earlier

41. See Steven Sack, 'From Country to City: The Development of an Urban Art,' in *Ten Years of Collecting*, edited by A. Nettleton and D. Hammond-Tooke. 'Many of the most talented of the black artists in South Africa have either died young and tragic deaths or have chosen to live in exile.'

42. A distinctive feature of social organisation in many African societies is to group citizens together in so called age groups according to generational adherence. This classification is here transferred to a pan-African level.

43. The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, assembled on the initiative of King Leopold II of Belgium, divided Africa into spheres of interest of European powers and functioned as the starting shot for a phase of intensified colonisation sometimes called 'the Scramble for Africa'.

44. The predominantly Muslim Bamoun society is said to have experienced a golden age of learning and cultural initiatives under Sultan Ibrahim Njoya (1886-1933). About his cousin and namesake, the artist Ibrahim Njoya, I wrote in the essay 'Konst fran Soder om Sahara': 'Not everything was about looking towards the West. The original Cameroonian painter Ibrayima Njoya, active already at the beginning of the century and one of the first autonomous artists south of Sahara, was around 1920 commissioned by his cousin, the sultan of the Bamoun people, to develop a genuinely Bamounian art of painting. He seems thereby to have been inspired, in battle scenes scattered all over the picture, by Persian miniatures.' Adding that '[d]ecades later other artists would seek pictorial knowledge from the same quarter' I was referring to Muslim modernist painters in Sudan.

45. Ampofo studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh 1933-39 and became a pioneer in the modern use of traditional herbal medicine. In Europe he began producing sculpture and showed a similar preservationist attitude to the pre-modern African sculptures, which he discovered in European museums. He urged fellow modern artists in Africa to re-conquer the heritage by imitating them, an attempt at an African 'Neo-Classicism'

46. Njau subsequently established art galleries in Kenya and in Tanzania.

47. About the Vohou-Vohou group the research indicated that it counted an unusual number of women artists, among whom at least Christine Ozoua seems to have developed a modern style of her own, but none of which has become established outside Ivory Coast. To their male colleague Bakari Ouattara, on the contrary, who in vain tried to make a career in Paris, 'it happened that the late African American artist

Basquiat came to Paris (...) He took Ouattara with him to New York. And as a consequence this painter became the African comet with exhibitions 1989-90 in New York, Los Angeles, Japan, Paris.' Evelyn Nicodemus, 'Konst fran Soder om Sahara', op.cit. 28.

48. President Senghor established two sections at the Ecole des Arts in Dakar, one for teaching his somewhat primitivising Negritude aesthetics, which was headed by Papa Ibra Tall, and one for modern art in a more general sense, where Iba N'Diaye was teaching. The latter, with whom I had personal contact, has in writings explained why he wanted to be judged as an artist, finding it offensive to be judged on some presumptions of 'Africanity'.

49. Students at the Ahmadou Bello University Art Department in Zaria, led by Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko, questioned the European style of teaching and demanded to have African and Nigerian art issues included in the curriculum. They established a kind of study circle among themselves, attempting to process local visual traditions with modern artistic methods. It is interesting to notice, in Sylvester Ogbechie's monograph on Ben Enwonwu, that there at the time of independence arose strong feelings of competition, even of repudiation and suspicion, between the Zaria Rebels and Enwonwu, a conflict between the generations which corresponds to the kind of 'conflict in position taking', which Bourdieu considers typical of the function of the field of modern visual art. See Sylvester Ogbechie, *Ben Enwonwu. The Making of an African Modernist*, op.cit. 155, and Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op.cit. 136-137.

50. The civil war and its repercussions seems to be a sensitive issue to Nigerian art historians and is in most cases passed over in silence, evidenced for instance in Chika Okeke's essay on the Natural Synthesis, where it is not mentioned. See Chika Okeke-Agolu, *Nationalism and the Rhetoric of Modernism in Nigeria: The Art of Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko, 1960-1968*, African Arts Vol. 39 No.1, 2006. After the Biafra war, in the eastern part of the country the approach of Natural Synthesis was changed into a Primitivist celebration of a pre-modern women's art, Uli, a widespread cult imagining a rather unhistorical 'African way' to abstract art, which I have analysed critically. As John Pepper points out in *Art and the End of Apartheid*, in South Africa, an analogous romanticizing of women's geometrical house paintings among the Ndebele people was inspired by a similar wishful thinking by several black South African artists.

51. The conscious artistic exploration of the unconscious is a modern phenomenon in western art. As examples can be cited the Surrealist experiments with automatism and the kind of physical spontaneism developed in Jackson Pollock's drip paintings. The latter was encouraged as an experimental practice suitable for a fortnight's workshop in the Thupelo workshops in South Africa initiated in the 1980s as part of the Robert Loder organized Triangle project. The Thupelo workshop art represents a rare example of a direct application in Africa of a western modernist trend. In South Africa it was hotly discussed. See John Pepper, *Art and the End of Apartheid*, op. cit. 146-51.

52. Gregory Bateson, 'Style, Grace, and Information in Primitive Art', in Howard Murphy and Morgan Perkins, *The Anthropology of Art. A Reader*, Malden, MA, and Oxford, UK, 2006, 78-90.

53. See Marshall W. Mount, *African Art: The Years since 1920*, op. cit. 97.

54. In my essay 'Art from South of Sahara' I quoted him saying 'Certain Europeans, seeking exotic thrills, expect me to serve them folklore. I refuse to do it – otherwise I would exist only as a function of their segregationist ideas of the African artist'. Evelyn Nicodemus, 'Art from South of Sahara', *Konstperspektiv* 3/92, 1992. Translation from French by Kristian Romare, English translation p.9.

55. Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, op. cit. 125.

56. Marshall W. Mount, op. cit, xv.

CHAPTER 4: EXTENDING TRAUMA STUDIES AND VISUAL ART PRACTICE

This chapter connects to the research on psychiatric trauma studies introduced in Chapter One through discussion of two primary aspects of the project *The Ethics of the Wound*, the extension of trauma studies to the field of visual art, a cross-disciplinary dialogue that was relatively under-developed compared to trauma studies relating to literature and film; and an analysis of my own artistic practice 1988-2008, in which the experience of PTSD informed the questions that led to my research into trauma. I argue that while several scholars, notably Jill Bennet and Dominick LaCapra, have dealt with the subject of trauma and visual art from the point of view of an empathic *reception*, my approach has predominantly been determined by my artistic practice and has consequently addressed the subject additionally from the point of view of *production*.

Bennet has written that, '(i)n the humanities, the development of trauma studies in the United States in the 1990s has prompted a revaluation of modernist literary texts'. And she continues: 'Up until now, theorists of trauma and memory have paid relatively little attention to visual art'.¹ My decisive confrontation with the American school of interdisciplinary trauma studies triggered questions about how and to what extent traumatic experience had influenced my artistic practice as well as the impact of trauma in the production of other artists.

What was instructive about interdisciplinary trauma studies? In the first instance they addressed questions about memory and in a wider sense about questions 'that we do not know, that we do not yet possess as questions, but which nonetheless compellingly address us from within contemporary art'.²

Both Felman and Laub and Cathy Caruth³ ascribe a central role to art, and yet neither book includes visual art. This strengthened my decision to extend trauma studies into the field of visual art, reflecting on the methods, materials and motifs I had employed in my own practice.

An essay that was written in 2001 (published in 2004), ‘Modernity as a Mad Dog’, was my first attempt methodically to sort out my thinking in response to the confrontation with the new research, drafting a strategy for dealing with trauma and visual art.⁴ I touched upon the problems of psychoanalysis and memory in an opening and a closing section that I gave the titles ‘Psychology and Blacks’ and ‘Words and Our Visual Brain’. I was aware that through the 20th century, studies on memory had been influenced to a big extent by Freudian psychoanalysis. However, whilst acknowledging the indisputable importance of the work of Freud and his followers, I found that it possessed a Eurocentric limitation characteristic of its time and place and was clearly distinct from the approach of Frantz Fanon, who, I suggested, ‘brings Freud’s thinking on trauma into the daylight of a wider cultural and political field in order to build an understanding of postslavery and postcolonial black existence’.⁵ Some few years later, Edward Said made a similar analysis in a lecture held at the Freud Museum in London, published as *Freud and the non-European*.⁶

In the section ‘Words and Our Visual Brain’ I discussed Semir Zeki’s *Inner Vision. An Exploration of Art and the Brain*, which accounts for clinical observations in advanced neurobiology and applies new knowledge to reflections on visual art.⁷ I have since noted that psychoanalysis – which as a therapeutic technique has moved from the centre to the margins of medical psychiatry but which keeps its important inspiring influence on cultural interpretation⁸ – recently has begun to harbour expectations of a regeneration in dialogues with neurobiological research. This was illustrated by the fact that the Anna Freud Centre in London in 2000 organised the First International Neuro-Psychoanalysis Conference. I was more in line with psychoanalytical researchers than I was aware of when, reflecting on the difference between trauma studies concerning literature and those exploring visual art, I asked questions like ‘is the word in itself already a representation, a construct?’ and ‘[d]oes our visual self-expression react more directly and intimately to traumatic intrusions into our mind? While, paradoxically perhaps, maintaining a certain integrity granted to the process of seeing, to our visual intelligence, even in the middle of the disarray brought on by the trauma?’

Between these two extreme points in the discussion on memory lies the question of oral tradition, and specifically oral traditions in Africa, which Fanon briefly touches upon and about which Kwame Anthony Appiah writes in *In My Father's House*. Appiah speaks about it in rather negative terms, which seem to be influenced by Eurocentric views. He writes about oral tradition less as part of African culture than as an absence of literacy, discussing the handicap this represents for the development of modern science, of power and of historiography.⁹ An alternative argument might suggest that oral tradition represents a socially organised and highly sophisticated culture of memorising and of creative collective forms of performative history telling. I have knowledge of the memorising practice from my own tribe; whilst Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike has produced a well-informed account of how oral storytelling has inspired cinematic narrative techniques in modern black African cinema.¹⁰

What ultimately motivated me to give less priority to psychoanalytical sources on memory was Cathy Caruth's definition of the intrusive flashbacks, hallucinations, dreams and painful thoughts that characterise PTSD, pointing out that they cannot be seen as repressed memories in the Freudian sense, because they are related to an exterior historical event. I have already referred to this decisive distinction in Chapter One,. She calls PTSD not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is the symptom of history. And she analyses traumatic experiences as 'experiences not of wholly possessed, fully grasped, or completely remembered events, but more complexly, of partially unassimilated or "missed" experiences'.¹¹ The traumatic memory is in this sense according to her a non-memory.

When I began this aspect of my research, I knew of no studies published on the issue of trauma and visual art. I subsequently found that a conference, *Trauma and Memory, Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, had been held in Australia in 1998, but that the papers were not published until 2003.¹²

Proceeding into uncharted terrain I had to advance tentatively. The difficulties I had experienced in finding words to testify to traumatic experience were confirmed by psychiatric observations: that, for survivors, trauma impairs not only memory and

thought processes but implementation of language as well and thus may lead to problems in testifying.¹³ This opened up a question as to the relation this impairment might have to visual art expression, possibly in the form of some kind of disfigurement of the visual narrative. Felman and Laub provided examples suggesting how traumatised writers found creative ways to speak of the unspeakable¹⁴, which represented a certain amount of guidance in the exploration of visual art.

Survivors of traumas related to catastrophes in our historical era, not least the Holocaust, show extreme symptoms of impairment of the act of testifying such as blocking out memory or obstruction and lengthy deferral of the power of telling. Aware of this, as a first step I attempted a kind of reconstructing operation in order to locate and identify the dimension of trauma in modern visual artworks. I also scrutinised works connected to biographies of artists known to have been exposed to traumatic events. The operation was carried out as a random inventory, selecting images from the Centre Georges Pompidou catalogue *Facing History, 1933-1996: The Modern Artist before the Historical Event* (1996).¹⁵ Having made that inventory, I then tried to reconstruct in what specific ways trauma had conditioned the production of each work. Beside a certain deconstruction of visual language, deviating from or adding to a previous artistically chosen language, I found examples of what seemed to have represented traumatic taboos forcing the artist to circumvent in different ways sensitive elements of the traumatic event, which refused to be represented.



Fig.1, Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, water-colour, 1920, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

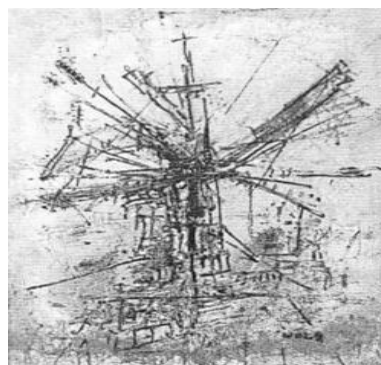


Fig.2, Wols, *The Windmill*, oil on canvas, 1951.

To enter this field and, even more so, in retrospect critically to reflect upon it, immediately raised questions, which go beyond terminological and even philosophical aspects. What can art works in themselves tell us about memory and lived experience of trauma? When talking about art as a kind of visual language of trauma or as visual testimonies, can we talk about 'Trauma Art'? Do we not then end up in the form of essentialism that made slogans like 'Black Art' obtrusive or even in marginalising the discussion as illustrations of psychiatric discourses? And, from the point of view of the viewer, how do we conceptualise trauma and identify its presence in an artwork?

The latter question is posed by Jill Bennett in *Empathic Vision*¹⁶, a scholarly inquiry into visual art and trauma that so far represents the closest parallel to my research. To the question how we identify the presence of trauma in an artwork, she adds: how 'if not through the application of existing clinical or theoretical models of trauma?' This question takes us middle into the psychiatrically informed research on trauma. It forces us, for instance, to ponder the limitations of representation, most explicitly referred to by the filmmaker Claude Lanzmann in the case of the Holocaust, when he comments upon his film *Shoah* and the impossibility to represent the Holocaust. And more generally to reflect on the problem in cases where what conventionally should stand for a 'content' - those phenomena Caruth specifies as typical symptoms of PTSD - consist of 'unknown experience' and 'missed memories'. This circumstance motivates Bennett's conclusion: 'Imagery of trauma does not easily conform to the logic of representation'.¹⁷

As conventional art historical methods principally build on art's representational or signifying function, this raises the further question of whether analysing the field of trauma related visual art demands the elaboration of an alternative theoretical discourse, which seems plausible, but is so far beyond the scope of my research. I restrict myself to arguing that trauma related art should be discussed, like art informed by feminism, as an integral part of what we discuss as art today, not as a separate category. This implies that there is much that links an art complicated by the symptoms of trauma to the wider spectrum of modernist experimentation, to which, as Adorno notes, 'productive artists are objectively compelled'.¹⁸ Adorno reminds us how scepticism toward

anthropological theories has often lead to recommendations to apply psychoanalytic theory, but that psychoanalysis considers artworks to be essentially unconscious projections, forgetting the categories of form.¹⁹ What the artwork demands from its beholder is knowledge, he writes. ‘The work wants its truth and untruth to be grasped’.²⁰ As he points out, suffering remains foreign to our knowledge, but dealing productively with the psychological pattern and process connected to trauma, which is involved in trauma related art, is accessible to our understanding, especially as ‘[t]he darkening of the world makes the irrationality of art rational’.²¹

My approach diverges from the empathic vision Bennett advocates when she proceeds from empathic reception to emotional response in a way that has a certain correspondence with Leo Tolstoy’s ideas about an emotionally educational art.²² What I appreciate is her firm insistence that the emotional empathy should lead to thought, a reasoning for which she finds support in the writings of Gilles Deleuze on encountered signs. Whilst my point of view differs in directing attention toward the problematic in the production as much as in the reception, I share Bennett’s aim to work towards an empathic but intellectually inquiring approach.²³

What remains unanswered are among other things a number of terminological questions. If we should avoid the term ‘trauma art’, at least in the diasporic scene in Britain, how far can we talk of visual production as ‘informed by’ or ‘instructed by’ traumatic experience, if there is no knowledge or conscious experience that can inform or instruct? How far can we talk of traumatic expression, if there is no definable content to be expressed? My research represents in many ways a tentative enterprise, and I have consequently often had to be content with terminological improvisations and approximations.

I have found that a further dimension may be added to aesthetical analysis by studying an artwork from the angle of the productive process and the artist’s grappling with forces related to symptoms of trauma. Sometimes these are about contradictory forces, compulsion to visualize and necessity of concealing, an urge to express and a prohibition to depict. The inner tension in saying what cannot be said represents one of

the specific dynamics of images produced where the artist is grappling with the symptoms of PTSD. An analysis taking those inner procedural factors into account is distinguished from readings of art perceived to be trauma related but interpreted merely as representations of catastrophes or of traumatising occurrences observed from outside.

The exhibition *Trauma* at Hayward Gallery in London 2001 gave an example of this latter approach to trauma and art.²⁴ ‘The fundamental error,’ writes Jill Bennett, ‘lies in the aesthetic reduction of trauma to the shock-inducing signifier ...[which] does not address the duration of trauma in memory.’ She also suggests that images graphically depicting trauma phenomena with the intention to shock may represent a presumptuous strategy, which fails to respect the dignity and autonomy of the victim, an ethical problem many authors have pointed to in the context of photography and a hesitation I have equally experienced.²⁵

Both Bennett and Dominick LaCapra²⁶ consider art testifying to trauma from the point of view of scholarly trained spectators with an empathic understanding and response to trauma imagery. Noting in the late 1990s that the problem of trauma had been prominent in recent thought, LaCapra critically observed that ‘there is a great temptation to trope away from specificity and to generalize hyperbolically, for example, through an extremely abstract mode of discourse that may at times serve as a surrogate for a certain form of deconstruction, elaborate an undifferentiated notion of all history (or at least all modernity) as trauma, and overextend the concept of victim and survivor’.²⁷

I cannot claim that I did not partly succumb to the temptation he refers to, as I titled my initial text on theoretical trauma research, ‘Modernity as a Mad Dog’²⁸, implying that all modernity might be understood in the light of trauma. My text was a cross reading of Kevin Newmark on modernity as a collective trauma²⁹, and Toni Morrison’s thoughts on black slaves as the first modern people.³⁰ But I sympathise with LaCapra’s call for concreteness. Subsequently, I would discuss trauma and art merely in relation to specific cases. This was the approach of both LaCapra and Bennett: the former focuses on the perspective from the Holocaust, analysing Camus’s *The Fall*, Claude

Lanzmann's *Shoah* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, while the latter writes about works by, among other artists, Doris Salcedo, Sandra Johnston, William Kentridge and Gordon Bennett.

A clear difference between their approach and mine, which may have reference to professional practises and starting points rather than to conflicting standpoints, is, as I have pointed to, represented by the fact that in my case it has been logical to develop analyses and discourses focusing on the process of production and on qualities and difficulties related to it. When I analyse trauma related works of art, the procedure can be characterised as a process of reconstruction and recognition. By following the artist's struggle through obsessions and ambushes caused by symptoms of a traumatic disorder and past taboos that were there to overcome or circumvent, I try to circumscribe a sensitivity and a kind of beauty enhanced by what seems to have been surmounted.

In the essay 'The Ethics of the Wound' I chose to analyse specific works by four artists, Wols and Jean Fautrier in Europe, Ezrom Legae in South Africa and Doris Salcedo in Colombia.³¹ Salcedo has worked throughout a lengthy period of dictatorship acting as a deeply involved bystander intervening in individual and collective traumas caused by political disappearances and violence through installations evoking mourning (submitted essay No.16, 2). Informed by the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and as an eminent theoretician she has contributed invaluable knowledge to the study of trauma.³² I noted in the analysis in 'The Ethics of the Wound': 'The crucial point in Doris Salcedo's procedures of making vicarious testimonies to hidden traumas is that she reaches beyond the subject-object position taken by most artists vis-à-vis their fellow humans, whom they tend to abuse, often in the middle of acts of deep solidarity, in the sense of treating them as objects'.³³

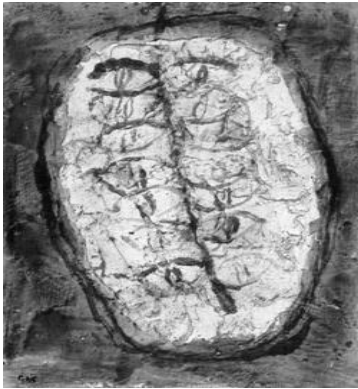


Fig 3, Jean Fautrier, *Head of a Hostage*, oil on panel, 1945.

Studying the biographies of Wols, Fautrier and Legae, which were intimately related to violence and to threats of extermination during the Nazi-German occupation of France in World War II and in South Africa during apartheid., I found that all three had been struggling with a specific problem of avoidance, an insuperable reluctance directly and graphically to represent physical annihilation of human beings. The strategy in Wols' paintings from immediately after World War II was to obliterate all pictorial and representational structure, producing informally abstract images suggesting an emotional chaos (fig.2). In the case of Fautrier's famous series *Otages* (Hostages), produced during the war and exhibited in 1945 (fig.8), the solution was to invent a new technique by replacing the representation of human bodies with abstract 'bodies' of heavily impasto paint matter.³⁴

Ezrom Legae chose to represent slaughtered animals as surrogate human corpses, a stratagem that the two other artists also resorted to in paintings and photographs. I discussed these artistic deliberations, which I argue were brought on by trauma and resulted in aesthetic innovations, with references to theories on death and animality by the philosophers Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben and Gottfried Leibnitz. Wols and Fautrier anticipated and are thought to have inspired *art informel* in France. In Chapter Five I shall as mentioned return to Ezrom Legae and the highly instructive example of a deeply traumatised, artistically potent production that his famous *Chicken Series* represent.³⁵

Hal Foster, in *The Return of the Real*, is the most widely quoted among scholars who have dealt with trauma from within art theory.³⁶ But I have some reservations about his writings on trauma from the point of view of my own trauma studies, in spite of the fact that for instance Michael Rothberg mentions him as one of the leading theoreticians on the matter.³⁷ In Foster's text *Trauma Culture*, which I read with the expectations of finding his theoretical position specified, he deals with trauma studies with a certain intellectual arrogance.³⁸ He appears to have visited the field of trauma and art not least in order to assimilate certain current notions applying them as catchwords in a promotional art criticism. I share Jill Bennett's view when, after appreciating comments about his brilliantly aphoristic way of connecting trauma discourse and poststructuralist critique, she notes that he deals with the figure of trauma as an explanation of phenomena in the world of art.³⁹

The approach to trauma and art that I first developed in the essay 'Modernity as a Mad Dog' and that I applied in a more accomplished way in the essay 'The Ethics of the Wound', was worked on in two essays published in Spain.⁴⁰ They belong to the theoretical component of the project *Ethics of the Wound*. With regards to the art practice that constitutes the visual part of that project, a number of exhibited and published artworks and series of works are submitted as representing a visual working through – respectively working from or working on - experiences of PTSD.⁴¹

The series of drawings *The Object* (1988) have brought to the fore the complexity of the relation between unconscious and conscious processes in art. The series was produced in a context that was specific in two different ways: it was part of my discovery and development in that year of drawing as a medium; and the production of the series followed immediately after the event of a traumatic breakdown.

Until 1988 I had never made drawings, either in the sense of drafting compositions on canvas, or in the sense of drawing from life or of practicing drawing on paper as an independent medium. During my stay as an invited guest student at the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst in West Berlin in 1988, I was encouraged to make drawings, at first in

charcoal. On a visit to Budapest later that same year I developed a multimedia drawing technique.

What interested me in drawing was the immediacy of the procedure, a quality that was likewise underlined in Catherine de Zegher's and Avis Newman's exhibition catalogue *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Art*.⁴¹ I also experimented with extremely fast line drawings, a procedure I experienced somewhat like snapping a melody from the unconscious. It added to what I had already noticed as an opening towards more unconscious procedures in my preference for producing works in series, letting one image call forth another image without having recourse to verbal thoughts. (Compare my reference to Gregory Bateson in chapter 3 concerning unconscious processes in modern African art).

There was another aspect to this complex of problems in the series *The Object*. When I regained consciousness after the breakdown and was struggling to regain a certain mental balance, the drawing materials were 'waiting' for me on the working-table, which was also the dining table. I had been using them up to the breakdown. The immediate accessibility of the materials prompted me to begin to draw. And I continued to draw day in and day out, afterwards naming the series *The Object*. I produced the drawings in an 'unconscious manner' in so far as it was only afterwards, when they were analysed and interpreted from outside, that I could begin to reflect upon them as representing unconscious experiences. With their obsessive repetitions of one and the same unstable and threatening scene, inhabited by what probably has to be understood as a symbolic self-portrait, they bear the signs of being closely connected to the preceding traumatic event.

But if we consider them representing compulsory traumatic reflections of that event, then we should probably take into account the specific nature of a 'traumatic unconsciousness' that Cathy Caruth describes as 'experiences not of wholly possessed, fully grasped, or completely remembered events, but more complexly, of partly unassimilated or "missed" experiences'.⁴²

The drawings *The Object* could be recognised as bearing witness to the crisis in such a complex way. However, for a long time I was uncertain if I could define the later series of oil paintings, 'The Wedding' (1991-94), as explicitly communicating experiences of trauma.⁴³ Both series (fig.4 and 5, plates 33-38) were represented at the exhibition *Crossing the Void* at C.C.Strombeek in Brussels 2004, which together with the adjacent international symposium *The Limits of Representation. On Trauma, Violence and Visual Arts* functioned as a kind of defining framework of my trauma related production.⁴⁴

The exhibition included the series *Birth Mask* (2002), which was produced as an integral part of the processing of the research on psychiatric and literary trauma studies and which could be said to represent the first informed experimentation with trauma related strategies (fig.6, plates 41-43). Beside this series of assemblage constructions there were the collages on linen *Post Mortem, A day in our time* (plates 44-45) and *In memoriam*, all from 2004 and dealing with trauma, and, as a central piece, *Reference Scroll on Genocide, Massacres and Ethnic Cleansing* (2004)⁴⁵, which positions individual trauma in a historical and global context (chpt 1, fig.3 and plates 47-52). In a poetic-pedagogical video *Beyond Depiction* (2004), I made an attempt to explain PTSD.⁴⁶

The essay 'Modernity as a Mad Dog' contained reflections on the two series *The Object* and *The Wedding*. I quoted an empathetic and exhaustive analysis of *The Object* made ten years later by Jean Fisher, where she speaks of a moment of paralysis and self-loss characterised by isolation and immobilisation and the 'disfiguration of the power of making, seeing and speaking'⁴⁷ About the series of oil paintings my text noted: 'When I now look back at "The Wedding", I hesitate to categorize the series as a testimony to trauma (...). I believe "The Wedding" can be read as a visual narrative about the traumatizing moment in Alsace.'⁴⁸



Fig.4, Everlyn Nicodemus, From the series *The Object*, mixed media drawings 1988.



Fig. 5, Everlyn Nicodemus *The Wedding*., oil on canvas 1991, the beginning of the series.

Recent research for this context paper confirmed and specified further from a psychiatric point of view those observations. Many psychiatric scholars agree that distinctive stages can be discerned on the road to a full-blown PTSD.⁴⁹ The first stage is termed Acute Stress Disorder, ASD. Following immediately upon the traumatic event and lasting between two days and four weeks, this phase, in which the series *The Object* seems to fit in, shows symptoms which, expressed in psychiatric jargon, come rather close to the terms used in the art critical analysis referred to above. The phase is described as characterised by dissociation, intrusion, avoidance, anxiety and hyper arousal symptoms

According to psychiatrists' assessment, a later conclusive stage on the road to full-blown PTSD consists of a long adaptation to the endurance of the state of fully developed PTSD. But in between these two phases psychiatric scholars indicate a period of chronic response to the traumatic event characterised by reactions to the stress and marked by anxiety, a characterisation to which the series *The Wedding* corresponds. At the time the series was consciously conceived as a counter to excruciating traumatic flashbacks of memories from the traumatic crisis in 1988.

I have referred here to the psychiatric clinical observations of different stages of PTSD not to indicate that the two series mentioned should be understood as illustrations to psychiatric theories but to strengthen the reasonableness of classifying them as belonging to the project *Ethics of the Wound*. The earliest visual works that I produced

after having acquired the consciousness gained through the theoretical trauma studies were, as mentioned, the series *Birth Mask*, nine constructions from 2002, in which I used metal netting to produce a space for assemblages.⁵⁰ I had noted that a typical interference by trauma in literary creation seems to be the blocking of any direct representation of the specific cause of the traumatism, while the strong urge to testify to it nevertheless persists. As already mentioned, these ‘taboos’ have forced traumatised authors to invent new strategies to circumvent them.⁵¹ I had found parallels in visual art in cases where specifically painful memories had proved to be too emotionally loaded to represent. In my visual production *Birth Mask* became an example.

I realised that I had already developed a technical stratagem which, applied to the no go area of memories refusing to be represented⁵², might indicate a circumvention. I had invented the technique five years earlier and called it ‘Intern-netting’, using it in several series of art works. An Intern-netting construction consists of a stretched canvas and metal netting mounted upon the canvas so as to form a space somewhat like a hen-coop of chicken-wire, kept in place with sisal thread. Fixed within the netted space some objects are assembled. Intern-netting represents a variation of the assemblage, only with the traumatic overtones of objects being interneers. Typical for an assemblage is that it ‘presents’ rather than ‘represents’, putting objects forward instead of depicting them.



Fig.6, Evelyn Nicodemus, Birth Mask 4 and 2, canvas, assemblage, metal netting, sisal, 2002

In the case of the series *Birth Mask*, the assemblages presented objects rich in associations to the circumvented ‘subject’ such as, beside exotic masks, christening

robes and round stuffing suggesting pregnancy. With that device it proved to be possible to circumvent the traumatic taboo, as the works were not pictorially 'written' – a process in which trauma often seems to interfere - but nevertheless 'readable'. It indicates that the tendency connected to PTSD of psychic blockages may be less insuperable in these kinds of technological constructions than in a conventional literary or visual representation.

A kind of assemblage principle was also applied in the case of *Reference Scroll of Genocide, Massacres and Ethnic Cleansing*.⁵³ Here the elements assembled consist of texts about deeply traumatising events like genocides and wars, recent and historical, which, printed digitally on linen stripes, are stitched together to form a scroll (see DVD with digital animation of the texts). A printed presentation at the beginning of the scroll talks of its 'visual presence' (plate 48). It is a dimension that should be understood as both represented by the assemblage character - which is to present visually - and by the aim of making the work function as a visual dilation being present in exhibitions on the theme of trauma and in dialogue with the rest of the exhibited works. I was consequently able to build exhibitions around it in Brussels, Brixton and Kendal⁵⁴ (plates 50-54).

In the works presented under the project title *Ethics of the Wound*, the artistic practice tended once more to embrace wider categories of activities like it did with the project *Woman in the World*. Visual works, multifunctional exhibitions, commenting videos and symposia no longer distinguished themselves categorically from written theoretical work. Both the *Reference Scroll* and the video *Beyond Depiction* would in the following years function in new constellations and give occasion to exhibitions and symposia as well as to texts like 'Guantanamo Blues. Knickers as Instruments of Torture'.⁵⁵ The entirety of published works submitted here represent a multifaceted project consisting of varying practices, of which those presented under the title *Ethics of the Wound* may be considered just one part.⁵⁶

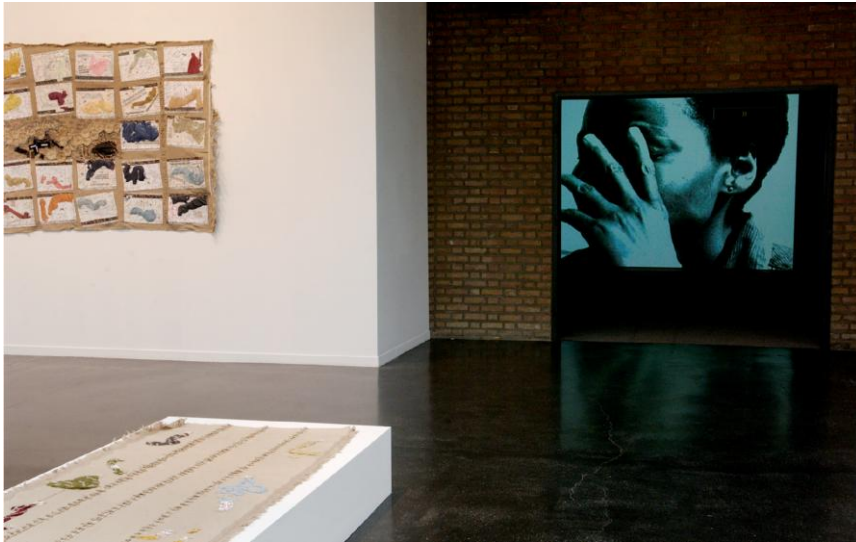


Fig.7, A frame from the video *Beyond Depiction* projected at the exhibition *Crossing the Void*, 2004

Endnotes

1. Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision. Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press 2005, 23.
2. With those words Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub M.D. begin the foreword to *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, a work that was inspired by their collaboration as professors in literature and psychiatry respectively at Yale University. It has in turn inspired the new genre of interdisciplinary trauma studies. Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub M.D. (eds), *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, New York, London: Routledge, 1992, xiii.
3. Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma. Exploration in Memory*, Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press 1995.
4. Everlyn Nicodemus, 'Modernity as a Mad Dog: On Art and Trauma', in G.Mosquera and J.Fisher (eds), *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and The MIT Press 2004, 260-61, 273.
5. Ibid. 260.
6. Edward Said, *Freud and the Non-European*, London, New York: verso 2003.
7. Semir Zeki, *Inner Vision. An Exploration of Art and the Brain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999. Zeki, professor of neurobiology at the University of London, writes for instance about the brain's capacity in recognising human faces. '(T)he brain area that is crucially involved in facial recognition is quite large and may have further specialisations within it.' He discusses specificities of this capacity in relation to portraits by Velazquez, Titian, Vermeer and Picasso from the Cubist period (167-180).
8. See Paul Antze, *The Other Inside: Memory as Metaphor in Psychoanalysis*
www.nya.edu/fas/ihpk/UnconsciousForces/Antze.pdf

9. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House. Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992, 130-133. Appiah states for instance that 'the very low level of its literacy shaped the intellectual possibilities of precolonial Africa' (131).

10. Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, *Black African Cinema*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press 1994. Ukadike, who was a student of the Nigerian artist Jussuf Grillo (in the group of the 'Zaria Rebels') and who is associate professor of Film and of African & African Diaspora Studies at Tulane University, writes in the chapter 'Oral Tradition and the Aesthetics of Black African Cinema', that 'one of the principal constituents of oral tradition is the organization, examination, and interpretation of society's past and present (...) [and] the fragmentation of linear images and their remolding in "new configurations and contexts", to use E.H.Gombrich's phrase, can be achieved by blending oral art with cinematic art' (131).

11. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, op. cit. 124.

12. Jill Bennet and Roseanne Kennedy (eds), *World Memory. Personal Trajectories in Global Time*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

13. In the chapter 'Education and Crisis' Felman writes: 'In testimony, language is in process and in trial, it does not possess itself as a conclusion, as the constataion of a verdict or the self-transparency of knowledge.' Felman and Laub, op. cit. 5.

14. Subjected to analyses in *Testimony* are Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the House of the Dead* and *Notes from the Underground*, Stephane Mallarme, *Crise du vers*, Albert Camus, *The Plague* and *The Fall*, Paul Celan's poetry, Paul de Man, *Excuses (Confessions)* and *Exercise du Silence* and Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*, while Kevin Newmark in his essay 'Trauma. Explorations in Memory' in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma. Exploration in Memory* op.cit. sets out from Charles Baudelaire, *On the Essence of Laughter*, and Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, to suggest the traumatic nature of modernity.

Some analyses show the authors avoiding – or through trauma being incapable directly to represent – the traumatic event or a traumatic conflict and instead inventing ways to write implicitly or symbolically 'around it'. One could in those cases perhaps apply the term 'transference' from psychoanalytic therapy, here used in a wider sense of metaphoric representation. The words metaphor and transference signify the same thing.

15. See Nicodemus, 'Modernity as a Mad Dog: On Art and Trauma', op cit. In the catalogue volume *Face a l'histoire 1933-1996, l'artiste moderne devant l'evenement historique*, Paris: Flammarion, Centre Georges Pompidou 1996, I chose as potentially traumatised works a drawing by Paul Klee from 1933, Richard Oelze, *Waiting*, 1935-36, Salvador Dali, *Premonition of the Civil War*, 1936, Pablo Picasso, *Weeping Woman*, 1937, Jacques Lipchitz, *Strangling the Vulture*, 1937, Wols' and Jean Fautrier's informal works, Kosho Ito, *A Work in Red and Chesnut for Hiroshima*, 1988, Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, *Matrixial Borderline*, 1990-91 (related to Holocaust), Antoni Tapies, *Murderer*, 1974, Luis Camnitzer, *From the Uruguayan Torture*, 1983, and Oleg Kulik's performance as a mad dog, 1995 (Chpt.1, fig.2, submitted essay No.15, 265).

16. Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, op. cit. 2.

17. Ibid. 3.

18. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London. New York: Continuum 1997, 30.
19. Ibid. 9.
20. Ibid.18.
21. Ibid. 25.
22. Antoon Van den Braembussche, *Thinking Art. An Introduction to Philosophy of Art*, Springer Science 2009. 39.
23. Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, op. cit. 7.
24. The exhibition *Trauma* at Hayward Gallery in London 2001 was curated by Fiona Bradley, Katrina Brown and Andrew Nairne.
25. Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, op cit. 11. A more recent anthology of essays on trauma, memory and visual culture, F. Guerin and R.Hallas (eds) *The Image and the Witness*, London, New York: Wallflower Press 2007, illustrates how trauma theory becomes integrated among other theoretical frameworks in interdisciplinary writing on art without distinction between trauma and catastrophes as subjects and with the question of ethics reduced to one viewpoint among others.
26. Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, Ithaka, London: Cornell University Press 1998.
27. Ibid. 23.
28. Everlyn Nicodemus, 'Modernity as a Mad Dog: On Art and Trauma', op. cit.
29. See note 14.
30. Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Culture*, London: Serpent's Tail 1993, 178.
31. Everlyn Nicodemus, 'The Ethics of the Wound', Antoon Van den Braembusche et al (eds), *Intercultural Aesthetics, A Worldview Perspective*, Springer Science 2008. The essay was originally written 2004 as a paper for the symposium *The Limits of Representation. On Trauma, Violence and Visual Art*, co-organized by Everlyn Nicodemus and Antoon Van den Braembussche at C.C.Strombeek, Brussels, chaired by him and with the participation of Thierry de Duve, Claude Lanzmann, Ernst van Alphen, Jean Fisher, Pam Johnston and Everlyn Nicodemus
- 32 Salcedo has since gained international status with among other things the intervention *Shibboleth* (2007) in the turbine hall at Tate Modern.
33. Ibid. 201.
34. I noted that there is much in Fautrier's background that points to his having been traumatised in World War I and to the influence of those experiences on his so called 'dark period' of the 1920s, which supports the analysis of the *Otages* series from the point of view of trauma studies, as it is well known that sufferers of trauma are prone to get traumatised again. Fautrier's dark period has been a focus of another, rather theologically informed interpretation of art between 1944 and the mid-1970s, namely the Christian and Eurocentric perspective symbolised by *l'homme douloureux*, (the mournful man) to which Sarah Wilson refers in connection with the exhibition *Traces du sacre* (Traces of the Sacred) at the Musee Nationale d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris 2008. See Sarah Wilson, 'La bataille des "humblés"? Communistes et Catholiques autour de l'art sacré' (The battle of the humbles?

Communists and Catholics around the sacred art) in *Melanges Bruno Foucart*, vol 2, Paris: Editions Norma 2008, 3-21.

35. The different versions of the *Chicken Series* by Ezrom Legae, executed in 1977-78 in a mixed media technique of pencil and oil wash on paper, were linked to the harrowing experience of the murder in police custody of the influential activist Steve Biko and of the brutal mowing down of school children, who, inspired by his ideas, had revolted in Soweto 1976. In initiated art circles the *Chicken Series* were talked of as Legae's 'Steve Biko series'.

36. Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T Press 1996. One can follow a line from Foster's participation in the round table debate on the politics of the signifier in connection with the Whitney Biennial in 1993 to his seminal book *The Return of the Real* in 1996 and his co-authoring *Art since 1900* in 2004. In *The Return of the Real* he deals with the traumatic effect of avant-garde activity and, referring to Freud and Lacan, sets out to counter Peter Burger's condemnation of the neo-avantgarde after World War II in Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974) and to legitimise the avant-garde at the end of the century by applying the notion of trauma.

37. Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism. The Demands of Holocaust Representation*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2000, 137. 'Trauma theory, as it has been developed recently by Caruth, Hartman, Zizek and Foster'.

38. Hal Foster, *Trauma Culture* <http://www.artnet.com/magazine/features/foster/foster7-26-96.asp>. He talks of 'the obscene vitality of the wound' and 'this fascination with trauma' and points to 'a lingua trauma ...spoken in popular culture, academic discourse, and the art and literary worlds.'

39. Jill Bennet, *Empathic Vision*, op cit' 5. She concludes that Foster's analysis 'is a diagnostic analysis conducted from within the discipline of art theory providing an explanation for the way in which the figure of trauma is troped or borrowed to describe a condition that already pertains within the art world.'

40. Evelyn Nicodemus, 'The Work that has Begun', *Atlantica* no 43. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria 2006, 3-19, and 'History, Trauma, Visual Art', *Arco contemporary art*, no 39 Madrid, 2006, 14-18. In the latter essay I analysed traumatic experiences from the point of view of artists from different countries, among others Antonio Saura in Spain. I also critically discussed the analysis of Fautrier and Wols in *art since 1900*, a criticism I came back to in 'The Ethics of the Wound', writing 'I have similar reservations concerning the authors of *Art since 1900*, when they try to explain the character of the "Otages" by arguing that it should be taken to reflect, not something seen, but something the artist heard in the forest.' Evelyn Nicodemus, 'The Ethics of the Wound' in A. Van den Braembussche et al. (eds), *Intercultural Aesthetics*, op. cit. 196. See also Hal Foster et al., *Art since 1900*, New York: Thames & Hudson 2004, 341.

41. Catherine de Zegher (ed) and Avis Newman, *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act*, London: Tate Publishing and The Drawing Center, New York, 2003, 71. In the catalogue for an exhibition of drawings selected from the Tate collection, Newman states in an conversation with de Zegher, that '(r)etracing the drawer's movements between hand and eye is one of the profound pleasures of looking'. And referring to Merleau-Ponty's consideration of 'vision as an

operation of thought' he continues: 'the transmission of thought can depend on the hand and the eye (...) an act that pitches the hand across the space of the page to site the mark where one intends'. It 'is quite a precise act: the most thoughtful and deliberate of acts, which I would speculate harbours a necessary thoughtlessness'.

42. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996.

43. The title of the series of 84 oil paintings, *The Wedding*, has the character of a camouflage, as the series is about meeting death, fighting death and returning to life (plates 36-38).

44. The cost of the symposium, which I initiated in parallel with my exhibition *Crossing the Void* at C.C.Strombeek, Brussels, November-December 2004, left no room in the budget for a catalogue. In its place a professional photographic documentation of the exhibition and of exhibited works was organised, which is submitted among the documentation.

45. On the production of the *Reference Scroll on Genocide, Massacres and Ethnic Cleansing* as a time consuming and reflective procedure see Everlyn Nicodemus, 'Guantanamo Blues. Knickers as Instruments of Torture', *Wasafiri*, Vol.22. No. 2 July 2007, 24-33.

46. The video *Beyond Depiction*, which I made in collaboration with the Russian video artist Alexandra Dementieva and art historian and TV-producer Kristian Romare, has been shown at my exhibitions in Brussels and Brixton, at a conference on trauma in the tropics that took place on the fifth October 2006 at the Royal Society of Medics in London and to which I had been invited by the Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland, at the international conference *Africa in Scotland, Scotland in Africa* organised in 2009 in Edinburgh by the University of Edinburgh, and at the *Black History Event* organised in Edinburgh 17.10.2009 by the African Centre Scotland.

47. Jean Fisher, 'Everlyn Nicodemus: Between Silence and Laughter', in the catalogue *Displacements*, Sala de Exposiciones de la Universidad de Alicante, Spain 1997, also published in *Third Text* no 40, 1997, and in Jean Fisher, *Vampire in the Text: Narratives of Contemporary Art*, London: INIVA 2003.

48. Everlyn Nicodemus, 'Modernity as a Mad Dog: On Art and Trauma' op. cit. 269.

49. Bessel A.van der Kolk, Alexander C.McFarlane and Lars Weisaeth (eds), *Traumatic Stress. The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, New York: The Guilford Press 1996, 156.

50. *Birth Mask 1 – 9*, assemblage, canvas, metal netting, sisal, 120 cm x 100 cm 2002.

The series progressed toward abstraction from graphically situating the assemblage in the traumatic context (1-4) via an African mask of pregnancy (5) to assemblage constructions with references to the material side of artistic production (6) and to fertility in the vegetal world (9).

51. An example of literary flanking movements is, for instance, Paul Celan's poetry, about which Shoshana Felman writes that it represents the obscure direction and unknown destination of his journey through the history of Holocaust, and that it circumvents the fact that his mother was killed by the Nazis by instead dealing with the problems connected to his mother tongue, German, and the 'quite unbearable and dissoluble connection to the language of the murderers of his own parents.' (25-27). Another example

is Albert Camus' novel *The Plague*, apropos of which she asks: 'If the narrative is testimony, a historiographical report whose sole function is to say "This is what happened", why, however, does Camus have recourse to the metaphor of the plague (...) Why not refer directly to the Second World War as the explicit subject of the testimony?' (101). And before Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* she raises the question 'What does it mean that the testimony cannot be simply reported?' (205).

52. The traumatic reference in *Birth Mask 1-4* is, as poetically narrated in *Beyond Depiction*, to memories of miscarriages caused by stress, hence the double reference to pregnancy and death.

53. *Reference Scroll on Genocide, Massacres and Ethnic Cleansing*, stitched linen with digitally printed text, 1600 cm x 90 cm, 2004. The title is printed at the beginning of the scroll with the following presentation: 'Visual presence of human memories and traumas. Where not otherwise noted, my source has been The Encyclopedia of Genocide, editor Israel W. Charny, whom I thank for his support.' It was exhibited at C.C. Strombeek, Brussels, at 198Gallery in Brixton and at the Brewery Art Centre in Kendal, where the exhibition that was built around it had as title and theme *Bystander on Probation*, referring to the ethical problem of passively witnessing atrocities, something that with modern global media is becoming the problem of everybody (plates 53-54). Janice Cheddie notes instructively about this dialogical role of the scroll in her essay 'Listening to Trauma in the Art of Everlyn Nicodemus', that 'Nicodemus has sought to address this issue [to find a mode of visibility that does not ask us to become the other] by the placing of her own testimony of trauma alongside the genocide scroll.' *Third Text* Vol.21, Issue 1, 2007, 84.

54. In Brixton and Kendall the scroll was supplemented by a digital animation of its texts produced in collaboration with the Flemish computer art designer Thomas Laureyssens and with sound by sound designer Els Viaene (see DVD).

55. Everlyn Nicodemus, 'Guantanamo Blues. Knickers as Instruments of Torture', op cit.

56. To conclude the chapter, the following quotation summarises my work on trauma studies and visual art: 'That the visual arts have been underrepresented in trauma debates dominated by psychoanalysis, psychiatry and literary studies is an issue addressed by the work of the artist Everlyn Nicodemus and raised in her essay "Modernity as a Mad Dog: On Art and Trauma". The vital question, "how is it possible for the unrepresentable to enter a visual system of meaning?" is also central to Janice Cheddie's discussion of Nicodemus' work. Nicodemus speaks as a survivor of both individual traumatic experience and historical collective trauma; it is in her efforts to "work through" the former – the "difficulty in finding words" – that she comes retrospectively to reconnect with the latter, eventually performing the difficult roles, as she relates, of both "witness and critical commentator, narrator and listener". Jean Fisher, 'Diaspora, Trauma and the Poetics of Remembrance' in Kobena Mercer (ed.), *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*, London, New York: Iniva and The MIT Press 2008, 207.

CHAPTER 5: BLACK AFRICAN TRAUMA AND AFRICAN MODERN ART



Fig. 1, John Muafangejo. *Death of a Chief, Mandume*, linocut, 1971. The text inscribed on this unique document of white assaults on black leaders reads: 'Death of a Chief. Mandume the Ovambo Chief being decapitated by Lt. Tom Marony'. It reveals for how long traumatic memories could live among the people, as the murder took place 60 years before the artist made the linocut and wrote on it: "We remember him in our mind." See note 9.

In this chapter I expand the notion of cultural trauma briefly touched upon in the first chapter, giving a more detailed account of theoretical discussions. And I am finally rounding up the journey of my research by applying the notion of cultural trauma to the realities, as reflected in the archives, of African colonialism and to the history and the products of African modern art. It has been necessary to keep in mind LaCapra's call for specificity in analysis¹ especially when transferring observations in the West about collective trauma caused by drastic social change to the impact of colonisation and colonial rule on African societies and individuals. In the comparison I will make use of indications in new literature on Africa in political science.²

A sociological school of researchers on cultural trauma has, as already mentioned, recently been established. Jeffrey C. Alexander establishes its polemical position vis-à-vis psychiatric trauma studies. He asserts that its approach rests upon the rejection of what he calls a 'naturalistic fallacy', the notion of trauma understood in psychological terms as being caused by traumatising events, an approach shared by most psychiatric scholars as well as in general by lay authors. '(W)e maintain that events do not, in and

of themselves, create collective traumas. (...) Trauma is a socially mediated attribution'.³ Neil J. Smelser, another mainstay of the school, concurs by concluding that cultural traumas are for the most part 'historically made, not born'.⁴ In that way they cut through the Gordian knot of how to define the relation between collective and individual trauma, a question that has occupied the thoughts of several scholars. But Smelser nevertheless quotes Arthur Neil noting that a nation becomes permanently changed as the result of a trauma, just as the rape victim becomes permanently changed.⁵

Ron Eyerman, prominent within the group, has made extensive research into the cultural trauma caused by slavery and into how it has formed an African American identity. He admits that slavery may have produced psychological traumas. But he makes a point of stating that '(t)he notion of an African American identity, however, was articulated in the later decades of the nineteenth century by a generation of blacks for whom slavery was a thing of the past'.⁶

Their research has produced important knowledge in the field. For my part, taking into account their distancing themselves from an understanding of the nature of trauma common within trauma studies, I read their contributions as being part of a general discussion on collective identity rather than of trauma studies. And when it comes to the striking contrast between the relative silence that we meet in Africa about the trauma inflicted by colonialism and the abundance of documentation related to slavery that Eyerman can draw on⁷, I perceive this rather as a difference in cultural contexts.



Fig.2, Robert Duncanson, *Uncle Tom and Little Eva*, oil on canvas, 1853, The Detroit Institute of Arts.

As a nation of immigrants the United States valued and stimulated writing and publishing on questions of identity, developing a culture that produced an encouraging framework for writing and publishing narratives by slaves ‘(d)eprived of access to literacy, the tools of citizenship, denied the rights of selfhood by law, philosophy, and pseudo-science’, as writes Henry Louis Gates.⁸ If a corresponding culture seems to have been much less apparent in colonised Africa, one should keep in mind that a productive literacy was mainly the preserve of an elite minority educated and trained to serve the colonial system. The absence of interaction with white settlers’ oppositional opinion groups corresponding to the abolitionists in the United States, that could have encouraged more intimate insights into the traumatizing impact of colonial rule, may also have contributed to make black Africa into a vast ‘zone of silence’, to use an expression coined by Michel de Certeau. This raises the question of the silent complicity of white witnesses to colonial acts of cruelty against Africans, including the complicity of anthropological fieldworkers with colonial authorities.⁹

But before dealing with any circumstantial questions of that kind, we should try to answer the straight question that Gayatri Spivak has raised: can the colonial subaltern speak?¹⁰ I leave aside that her discourse builds on the specific history of Indian colonialism and that the term ‘subaltern’, coined by Gramsci but in common parlance connected to military rank, might be more relevant in the Indian context than in a colonised Africa, where the epithet looming behind the colonial wielding of power seems to have been ‘subhuman’ more often than ‘subordinate’. If we follow Spivak’s general conclusion, that for the oppressed the main way of speaking out is insurgency, research on the response to colonial oppression should first of all focus on African rebellions. But even that study runs across a predominant silence, because African uprisings were seldom documented from inside and have only reluctantly been inscribed into the archives by the oppressors.

When researching for the essay ‘Carrying the Sun on Our Backs’¹¹, in which I studied two well-known African insurrections, the Herero uprising in what is now Namibia (see endnote 9) and the Maji-Maji rebellion in today’s Tanzania, both directed against

German colonisers and occurring in the first decade of the 20th century, I had the opportunity to build upon comparatively rich documentation.¹² Both events were connected to an early phase of colonial rule and involved as principal actors remarkable individuals who belonged to the first and the second generation of colonised Africans. This accounts for the presence of a strong spirit of resistance.

In the former historic event, two African peoples, the Hereros and the Namas, struggled to overcome mutual hostility in order to join in resistance against the Germans. The correspondence between their leaders and the correspondence these leaders maintained with the outside world in order to gain support gives unique and invaluable insight into how the colonized in this case viewed the colonizers. The fact that the leader of the Namas, Captain Hendrik Witbooi, came from a family of political leaders in the Cape Colony, where a comparatively widespread literacy had been developed among people of mixed race, and that the leader of the Hereros, Maharero, had been educated by missionaries, contributes to the exceptional circumstance of an early literacy that explains the written communication.¹³

Two aspects of this insight are striking. Witbooi's letter to Maharero represents a sophisticated political analysis of the deceptive tactics of the Germans, who posed as benevolent allies aimed at splitting and subjugating African peoples. And from the side of Maharero we meet an outspoken advocacy of ethical warfare. He urged his subaltern chiefs to wage war in a human manner, to spare women, children and missionaries and not to lower themselves to the barbarian level of the colonizers. The conflict ended with German troops committing genocide, a historical fact recognised as one of the earliest genocides in the 20th century, which throws light on the contrast in moral attitudes.

It is difficult to draw conclusions concerning what may be hiding beneath the surface of a colonized Africa as a zone of silence from these extreme events connected to the violent establishing of colonial sovereignty. Everyday colonial rule was to exert its oppressive impact on every individual life, and the sum of it all can be seen as constituting the bulk of black African trauma. As a general conclusion we should accept, that the dominant absence of literate documentation in pre-modern and early

colonial Africa does not equate an absence in African societies of analytical thinking and of political consciousness of factors in the outside world, even of events far away. Basil Davidson points, for instance, to an awareness at this time among West African progressive groups of the example given by Japan of 'how a non-white people defeat[s] a strong white power'.¹⁴

Regarding the relation between individual and collective trauma, Paul Ricoeur notes that in many works Freud makes 'allusions to situations that go far beyond the psychoanalytic scene', and that Freud does not hesitate to make extrapolations between individual and historical situations. Ricoeur raises the question 'to what extent it is legitimate to transpose to the plane of collective memory and to history the psychological categories proposed by Freud.' He nevertheless concludes that it is 'the bipolar constitution of personal and community identity that ultimately justifies extending the Freudian analysis of mourning to the traumatism of collective identity. We can speak not only in an analogical sense but in terms of a direct analysis of collective traumatisms, of wounds to collective memory'.¹⁵

LaCapra shows a similar hesitation vis-a-vis what he sees as the problematic distinction between structural or existential trauma and historical trauma. 'Although one may contend that structural trauma is in some problematic sense its precondition, historical trauma is related to specific events, such as Shoah or the dropping of the atom bomb on Japanese cities. It is deceptive to reduce, or transfer the qualities of one dimension of trauma to the other, to generalize structural trauma so that it absorbs historical trauma, thereby rendering all references to the latter merely illustrative, homogeneous, allusive and perhaps equivocal'.¹⁶ It is an argument about what kind of events cause trauma that I cannot share. But LaCapra comes back to the question later in his text. 'Indeed the problem of specificity in analysis and criticism may be formulated in terms of the need to explore the problematic relations between structural and historical trauma without reducing one to the other.' That recommendation is what I have been keeping in mind when trying to transfer observations on traumatising social change in Eastern Europe to conditions in colonial Africa.¹⁷

When keeping to the view that trauma can be caused by different kinds of events and also by repeated events I have found support in Frantz Fanon's writings. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), referring to Freud's view of psychic trauma as caused by a specific traumatic scene, Fanon states that 'in contrast, however, to what was expected, it was not always a single event that was the cause of the symptom: most often, on the contrary, it arose out of multiple traumas, frequently analogous and repeated'.¹⁸ This observation has since been confirmed by, for instance, the psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman who, in reaction to a narrow definition of PTSD, argued that an individual trauma should not be perceived as always related to one overwhelming event but often is caused by a series of repeated events.¹⁹

Fanon has been a central source of inspiration in my research, and it is in the light of his observations that I have tried to understand the impact of colonialism in Africa as causing a collective trauma. His observation mentioned above is remarkably advanced, not least when seen in the context of an ethno-psychiatry in Africa in his time, which clearly represented an antiquated application of colonial ideology. It was expressed by an at the time prominent authority, J.C. Carothers, who explained the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya as due to 'the deficiencies characteristic of the native Kenyans' and not caused by British colonial policies.²⁰

Homi Bhabha points out in his important foreword to the 1986 edition of *Black Skin, White Masks*, that Fanon 'rarely historicizes the colonial experience' and gives 'no master narratives or realist perspective.' But conscious of Fanon's multifaceted competence as an author, a trained psychiatrist and a political thinker and activist he adds that 'he evokes it through image and fantasy (on the borders of history and the subconscious)'.²¹

When reading Fanon it is nevertheless easy to find observations that throw a sharp light on conditions relevant for my inquiry into the impact of colonialism on the production and the development of modern art in Africa. In *The Wretched of the Earth*,²² he writes: 'Colonialism is violence' (48) and 'While in the capitalist countries a multitude of moral teachers separate the exploited from those in power, in the colonial countries on

the contrary, the policeman and the soldier advise the native by means of rifle-butts and napalm not to budge' (29), and in *Black Skin, White Masks* he quotes Césaire: 'I am talking of millions of men who have been skilfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement' (9).

On the psychological and cultural paradox that individuals could embark at all on the adventure of expressing themselves in the form of modern art under such conditions, what he writes in *Black Skin, White Masks* on the African and Hegel may be applied: 'Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or recognized' (216). Noting that it is when self-consciousness encounters resistance that it becomes a driving force, that 'it undergoes the experience of desire' (218), he points to the circumstance, also paradoxical at first glance, that 'the African wants to make himself recognized (by) the White Master' (216), only not without conflict.

'There is a fact: white men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect' (12). When he puts what has been misinterpreted as African dependence on European culture in a wider perspective, he does it by analysing the meaning of language. 'To speak means (...) above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization. (...) Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation' (18).

To summarise, for Fanon black African trauma was no theoretical assumption but present and psychologically and politically palpable. As Bhabha writes, it is 'such a memory of the history of race and racism, colonialism and the question of cultural identity, that Fanon reveals with greater profundity and poetry than any other writer'.²³ The wound inflicted by racism is basic to Fanon's view on trauma.²⁴ But it applies for him differently in Africa and in the African diaspora. While in the latter – he refers to the Caribbean, his own origin - it is not least about the racist gaze of the white people

that affects and distorts the black African's self-awareness and ego – he goes as far as to note that a perfectly normal black child becomes abnormal when confronted with white racism²⁵ - in colonial Africa on the other hand racism was the essence and the motor of a system of oppression.

But the dominating and in the long run devastating colonial violence committed against Africans was not the exercise of physical force but, as I suggested in Chapter One, the brutal and sweeping social change forced upon them. It touched most aspects of existence, social life and individual behaviour and destinies, including religious and cultural practices. It ruined the bonds that had traditionally held Africans upright, now leaving them bowed under alleged white supremacy. If this can be said to represent the core of a black cultural trauma acting upon individual minds, Ann Kaplan in her essay 'Fanon, Trauma and Cinema' contributes two interesting observations to the discussion.²⁶ The first is that we should conceive Fanon as deeply traumatised himself, if we rightly listen to his testimony about the devastatingly traumatic encounter with a child in Paris hailing him as a 'Negro'.²⁷ It means that he was writing about trauma partly from the inside, using himself as a source of knowledge, not only making clinical observations from the outside.

Her second observation is about Fanon's manifested interest in the role of cinema. It is about how the destructive impact of colonialism reached into black African individuals' minds; about how modern technology brought by the colonizers in the form of cinema – she calls cinema an essential machine - produced alterations of perceptions and of thinking. The change was brought about firstly through the shocks of the moving image and of watching objects and faces larger than life and then also through the effect of distorting narratives. She could have mentioned that missionaries, experts in breaking up and changing minds when it came to religion, very early on used visual projections as their tools. As John Pepper writes in his essay 'Snap of the Whip/ Crossroads of Shame': 'For Christian evangelical missionaries, the rhetoric of salvation was easily conflated with the image of a lamp projecting light into darkness: the light of the "truth" of the gospels, and the light of European civilization and reason into the perceived "utter darkness" of "heathendom", "superstition", and "vice" of black Africa'.²⁸

The initial act of colonial conquest was in many cases sudden and rapid and with devastating effects. Two of the three cases I have studied closely couldn't but leave long term paralysing traumas that would impair creative visual testimonies, namely the cases already referred to: German genocide techniques in their South-West African colony, which they were later to perfect in Europe, and their likewise genocidal application of scorched earth tactics in what is today Tanzania.²⁹

The third case is more intricate. In the essay 'The Black Atlantic and the Paradigm Shift to Modern Art in Africa' I suggest that what happened to Ijebu-Ode, the native town of the painter Aina Onabolu, could be interpreted as representing a historical trauma indirectly leading to innovation in visual art.³⁰ What is substantiated in the sources is that Ijebu-Ode self-consciously had kept western traders and missionaries outside its high town walls. Despite being met with strong defence, a punitive attack by British forces in 1892 led to a traumatic defeat for the town. In subsequent years a great number of conversions among its citizens to Christianity and Islam are documented, indicating a loss of faith in traditional deities. It should not be too farfetched to interpret this as a tendency to seek rehabilitation by appropriating from the victorious foreigners what was presumed to contribute to their superior power. It then represents a pattern corresponding to the decision by Onabolu, taken a few years later, to appropriate western fine art.

My research has focused on the question of how modern African artists could brave, challenge and psychologically overcome colonial cultural oppression. I have not primarily concentrated my investigation on how they in their artistic representation have documented the oppression or commented upon it. Ernst van Alphen points to the role of what he calls the historical trauma in making a black audience oversensitive to graphic representations of colonial violence inviting re-enactment.³¹ In discussing representation while comparing African and western art histories, one should also keep in mind that in Europe, after centuries of post-Renaissance representation built on mimesis and linked to Europe's rise to power, the aesthetical formulation and the philosophical endorsement of radical abstraction had been encouraged by confrontations

with other, conceptually oriented art histories, not least the African. In Africa, the same centuries had seen the dominant presence of an expressively abstract mode of visual production, which in West Africa historically co-existed with a sophisticated, mimesis-based representation (Ife and Benin). This accounts for differences in the significance of representation that have been insufficiently analysed in writings on African art. Many modern African artists nurse a feeling of principal ownership of the abstract.

Two modern Nigerian artists, Erhabor Emokpae and Gani Odukotun, have for instance hovered between the extremes of a highly figurative mode of historical painting – mainly about military history, a genre richly represented in the National Gallery of Modern Art in Lagos – and a personally conceived pure abstraction. Significantly, Emokpae considered his abstract works closer to his heart and more typically African.³²



Fig 3 Erhabor Emokpae, *Struggle Between Life and Death*, oil on board, 1962, private collection.

In South Africa the white minority rule leading to apartheid occasioned strong political comments within visual production, first in paintings such as *The Song of the Pick* (fig.12) by Gerard Sekoto³³ and later on in ANC-inspired militant printmaking³⁴, while an abundance of apparently traumatised representation in paintings and sculptures by a number of black South African artists reflect their suffering under apartheid. The direct testimony to psychological trauma found in linocuts by the Namibian artist John Muafengejo is nevertheless exceptional (fig.1). His work expresses deep frustrations caused by South African military aggression in the South African Border War.³⁵

Outside Southern Africa similar politically committed art works are rare and mainly represent retrospective comments. I leave out of the discussion the example most often referred to, the history paintings by the Zairian (Congolese) naïve painter Tshibumbi Kando-Matulo about the cruel fate of Patrice Lumumba, as his contributions fall outside what I study as modern art, and as my research has indicated that they were commissioned by a European anthropologist.³⁶ To mention among representative works are the monumental drawing *The Inevitable* (1984-85) by Sudanese Ibrahim El Salahi³⁷, *Nigeria in 1959* by Demas Nwoko and a mural called *Tyranny and Democracy* (1994) by Nigerian Chika Okeke, which was published in the catalogue *Seven Stories of modern art in Africa*.

Notwithstanding the example of Onabolu, there is a serious lack of archival information that makes it difficult to construct generalisations about the psychological impact of colonialism in Africa and the extent to which it, on the one hand, may have prompted the development of autonomous individual creativity, and on the other, retarded the development of modern African art. New research in political science has however contributed knowledge about what the change in social and external contexts brought by colonisation meant. The following is a summary of what I learned in discussion with Patrick Chabal, professor of political science at King's College, London, and by reading his pioneering study *Africa. The Politics of Suffering and Smiling*.³⁸

The very foundation of the belief system was broken. It had been based on land and ancestors in the sense of belonging rather than on the worship of ancestors, a biased later interpretation. Instead of negotiable and overlapping circles of identity among groups of population, which represented the old structure, the new order that colonialism introduced was rigid and strictly organised along ethnic and tribal lines.

Colonial principles of power organisation and later on for party politics favoured individualism rather than the communal and local dimensions that had prevailed, with gender and age being relevant factors, e.g. so called age groups. But it meant an individualism of subordination, not a creative one. In pre-colonial Africa the authority of those in power, for instance local chiefs, had implied trust, competence and wisdom

manifested in mutual obligations and exchange. The introduction of colonially appointed and controlled local chiefs acting as colonial auxiliaries and with their authority and power resting on colonial weapons meant a total rearrangement of political structures with far reaching consequences on people's lives (fig.1).

Before being colonised Africans had enjoyed greater leeway, more religious freedom and more fluid obligations. In colonised African countries to be a subject meant becoming tributary to a central state that exercised absolute, unaccountable and arbitrary power over virtually every aspect of people's life. The colonial state acted like a feudal lord of the most brutal kind.

Perhaps the most radically impairing change concerned trade. While for centuries the Europeans had maintained relations with Africans in the form of a mutually beneficial commerce, colonisation changed this. It meant that western imperialism took possession of the continent's resources and redirected by force the local energy towards more profitable labour for its own purposes. Trade, once representing something close to an African lifestyle, was reorganised mainly to export of primary produce, leaving an existing and a potential African industry to waste away, so that Africans were left receiving modernity in the form of manufactured commodities instead of producing it.

The short period of completed colonial control, some eight decades or three to four generations, coincided with the intense culmination of the modernisation process in the West with innumerable interactions between science, technology, inventions in all fields and philosophical thinking. This fact made the impact of colonialism devastating. During this period Africans were forcibly restricted to what Ricoeur calls their primitive cultural resources, that is their traditional tools in the word's widest sense. What Ricoeur formulates as a universal ethics - 'an invention rightfully belongs to mankind as a whole' - just did not apply in Africa.³⁹ These and connected structural conditions combined for a long time to weaken any basis for a modern cultural production in Africa.

Instead of trying to connect the new data of colonialism as causing social change to possible scenarios in the field of visual art, which would inevitably result in sweeping speculations, my research followed the policy staked out in the essay *The Ethics of the Wound* ⁴⁰ and focused on an individual case, the artist Ezrom Legae and his *Chicken Series* from 1977-78. In his case it has been possible to analyse the cultural and political as well as biographic factors behind artworks obviously related to trauma, to follow his production process and to analyse the artistic strategies and the formal characteristics of the resulting works of art.



Fig.4, Ezrom Legae, Drawing from the *Chicken Series*, (known as the 'Steve Biko series'), conte on paper, c.1979.



Fig.5, Paul Stopforth, *Elegy* (from his Steve Biko series) mixed media on board, 1980-81, Durban Art Gallery, South Africa. This kind of direct representation of the murder of Biko was possible for a daring white dissident but would have been politically fatal for a black South African artist.

The *Chicken Series*, a number of consecutive series of drawings in pencil and oil wash, belong to the history of modern art under apartheid in South Africa. The peculiarities of apartheid distinguish it from the history of colonialism in other parts of Africa: it prevailed for thirty years longer than colonial rule in most African countries. But it nevertheless clearly belongs to the same arch-narrative of oppression. One of its

peculiarities was that the formal independence from British rule hardly affected the black majority, only implying a reorganisation of power within a white minority rule, which is why notions such as ‘postcolonial’ do not apply in a meaningful way. About the traumatic event behind the *Chicken Series* I wrote: ‘In the case of Ezrom Legae, the trauma event comprises not only witnessing killed and tortured black bodies but the entire black African experience and consciousness of hundreds of years of slavery, colonialism and oppression, leading to the extremity of horrors of the apartheid system in South Africa. To the long time, unspeakable horrors of apartheid’.⁴¹

In terms of artistic ‘strategies’, I chose as already mentioned in Chapter Four, to study Legae’s work together with the works produced during and after the Second World War by Wols and Fautrier, which show signs of an informal decomposition that according to my analyses were due to traumatic taboos about graphically representing slaughtered humans. Part of their strategy was to use animals as surrogate human corpses. Legae carried this further in a most convincingly artistic way by varying the image of a dead chicken. ‘In the “Chicken Series” we see Ezrom Legae tear open the body of a slaughtered fowl, exposing its inside and outside at the same time, tattered and torn, feathers off, meat exposed, bones sticking out, claws clutching. It is the epitome of destruction of life’.⁴²

When doing research in South Africa in 1995 I was unable to interview Legae. I was told that he was too ill and too traumatised. Through talks with artist David Koloane, gallerist Linda Givon and professor Elizabeth Rankin and from information in the archive I could establish the traumatic events immediately behind the series, which was referred to as his ‘Steve Biko series’. ‘Violent death surrounded the making of these drawings. He produced the first of several series in 1977, a year after the shaking moment of the murder of the black activist theoretician and leader Steve Biko, whose Black Consciousness-philosophy filled South African black students with enthusiasm and with the spirit of revolt. Biko was savagely murdered by the agents of the Apartheid regime when held in detention. And it was likewise the moment after the dramatic demonstration of the schoolchildren in Soweto, a protest that was most brutally crushed with hundreds of children shot dead’.⁴³ The event, which must have deeply shaken

Legae, meant on a national level a wake up call and would result in a general uprising and sixteen years later in the collapse of apartheid.



Fig.6. Ezrom Legae, *Chicken Series*, Pencil and oil wash on paper, 1977, De Beers Centenary Art Gallery, Fort Hare, S. A.

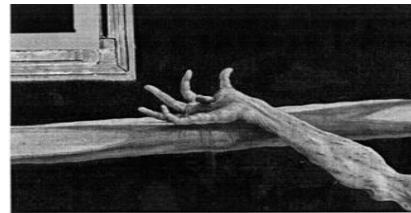


Fig.7. Matthias Grunewald, *The Isenheim altarpiece*, detail, 1506-1515, Isenheim, Alsace.

The biographical background that I could establish on Legae belonged to two circumstances. One was that he had recently relocated to Soweto, at the time a hotspot of tensions between the apartheid regime and young black South Africans, where he became a witness to the horrifying developments. The other is related to art historical references, which I identified as part of his artistic strategy consisting of a combination of the graphic and the metaphoric. A study tour through museums in Europe and the USA had provided possible references that he symbolically could inscribe in his images of a slaughtered fowl standing for apartheid's lethal violence. As some of these images described scenes of crucifixion, it was possible to recognise suggestive references to works such as Matthias Grunewald's Isenheim altarpiece and Francis Bacon's crucifixion paintings. These intellectual references played a role in his artistic strategy to work through his trauma experience using manifold allusions. Having reached that stage in my analysis, in my essay 'The Ethics of the Wound' I criticised as populist and primitivising an analysis of Legae's *Chicken Series* by John Pepper, in which he interpreted the series with reference to the work reproduced here in figure 6 in terms of common popular magic and as referring to widespread rituals of animal sacrifice.⁴⁴

The detailed research on South African art under apartheid that Pepper published in 2009, *Art and the End of Apartheid*, confirmed my analyses and added new knowledge,

which retrospectively supports my findings. Peffer writes: ‘The 1960s was the decade of entrenchment of apartheid, with the imprisonment and exile of the opposition, and the state’s increasing willingness to terrorize its own citizens. In black communities, mutilated, broken, or otherwise abused bodies became a common sight after 1976.’ And on visual production reflecting the violence he writes: ‘In the art of the period, the human figure was often put through animal transformations that indicated how this everyday brutality of apartheid was internalized and how it might be exorcised. Through the graphic distortion of the body and its distortions into a beast, artists posed trenchant questions about the relation of corporal experience to ideas about animality, community and the sacred’.⁴⁵

As Jan Nederveen Pietersee notes in *White on Black. Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*⁴⁶, European clichés about black Africa had first circulated in Africa in the Cape Colony, including the cliché about Africans’ ‘animality’, which had been institutionalised on a scholarly level when Carl Linnaeus revised the tenth edition of his *Systema Naturae* in 1758.⁴⁷

Peffer’s analysis is supported by illustrations comprising Sidney Kumalo, *Seated Figure*, charcoal 1965, representing a growling beast; Ezrom Legae, *Copulation*, charcoal 1970, representing monstrous sexual intercourse with an animal; and Dumile Feni, *Man with Lamb* 1965, where man and animal are grotesquely intertwined.

Peffer continues: ‘Dumile’s image of human-animal metamorphosis evoked a truth that could only be seen in the mind: the merging, or trading places, of victims and their abuses. And, Dumile’s bestial figures demonstrated an understanding of a fundamental condition of colonized people, that is, their own status as “animals”, as instrumentalized beasts of burden and as fungible *objects* for labour (and for abuse) in the economy of the colonial “masters”. Like Legae and Kumalo, Dumile sought to make sense of this debased condition and to contest it through art’.⁴⁸

Another aspect of an artwork produced in a traumatising context is that it represents the construction of a world of its own in which the artist can take refuge and where she/he

reigns unrestrictedly. It falls perhaps outside studies of trauma and art, but it represents an escape from traumatic frustration that I have myself experienced in my artistic practice. Because the examples of references to traumatic events are comparatively rare in modern African works, this aspect should perhaps be made the basis of another kind of inquiry. Peffer hints at the possibility of such research by writing about South African children's well-known toy cars made of wire. They often represented armed police trucks, so called hippos. Nervous about growing resistance in the country, the apartheid regime had redirected their heavy war machines from the external so called Border War in today's Namibia and Angola to black townships and homelands at home, where their appearance made a frightening impression not least on the children.



Fig.8, South African children steering wire cars. From *Staffrider* 2, 2 1979.

‘It is normal, especially for children, to react to objects of anxiety by imitating them. In the case of toy police trucks, the anxiety of a neighbourhood under siege by police coalesced around the object of the police armoured truck (...) As a handmade toy, the armoured truck was in the hands of the kids and as such became part of the imaginary play world under their control, a place they could own and manipulate and shield, even while making a microcosm of a real world that threatened their safety’.⁴⁹

By way of conclusion, there is a quality common to most modern African artworks related to colonialism. Let us for example compare a number of very different works: from South Africa a realistic sculpture by Ernest Mancoba of two children in school uniform from 1934 called *Future Africa*, and by his friend Gerard Sekoto a painting from 1946-47 of a reclining young black South African in a relaxed mood reading a

book (chpt.3, fig.4). And then by the same artists a bold abstract composition from 1940 by Mancoba and a scene of forced labour by Sekoto, already referred to, titled *Song of the Pick* from the years 1946-47 (fig.11 and 10). What unites them?

In their peaceful mood the two former works can be said sharply to cut through white prejudices about black allegedly lowbrow ways of life. But what is the link between an abstract work and a political image graphically exposing the absurdity of minority rule in South Africa by showing the collective strength of the African convicts and the insignificance of the white individual supervising them?

One could ask a similar question if comparing the Nigerian artist Ben Enwonwu's magnificent bronze *Anyanwu* from 1954-55, which thrusting forth from the wall with the force of an attacking cobra symbolises woman power (fig.12), to the Sudanese painter Ibrahim El Salahi's beautifully balanced semi-abstract *The Mosque* from 1964 and with Nigerian Erharbor Emokpe's purely abstract painting *Struggle Between Life and Death* from 1962, reduced to black and white geometry plus two handprints (fig.3).

What I am aiming at is of course the fact that these works, like most modern African works during or immediately after colonial time, before representing and/or symbolising anything specific stand for resistance. They withstand the demeaning western philosophy inherent in colonialism, with which art in Africa and in the diaspora are confronted. They represent acts of resistance and optimism.



Fig.9, Ernest Mancoba, *Future Africa*, Jarrah wood, 1934.

Fig.11, Ernest Mancoba, *Composition*, oil on canvas, 1940, private collection..

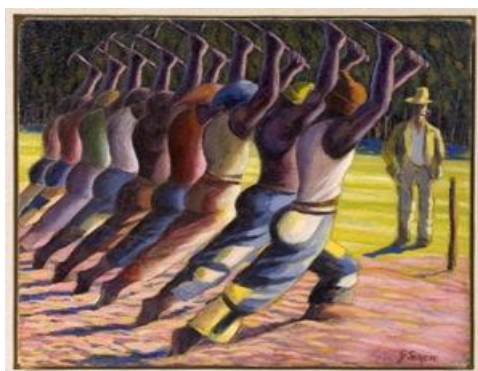


Fig.10, Gerard Sekoto, *Song of the Pick*, oil on canvas, board, 1946-47, Gerard Sekoto Foundation.

Fig.12, Ben Enwonwu *Anyanwu, or Awakening*, detail, bronze, 1954-55, United Nations, New York, and National Museum, Lagos.

Endnotes

1. Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press 1998, 48.
2. Patrick Chabal, *Africa. The Politics of Suffering and Smiling* (London, New York: Zed Books and Pietermaritzburg SA: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press 2009).
3. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al (eds), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press 2004), 8.
4. Neil J. Smelser, 'Psychological and Cultural Trauma', op.cit. 37.
5. Ibid. 42.
6. Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma. Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, Cambridge, New York, Cape Town: Cambridge University Press 2001.
7. Ibid. 2, 13. Ron Eyerman discusses how "the memory of slavery through speech and artwork" contributed to forming a notion of an African American identity. He refers to testimonies, narratives and descriptions such as slave songs and slave narratives, abolitionist literature and spirituals. After noting that slave songs were published in 1867 he writes about black visual art, that '[p]ainting and other forms of representation "from inside" were later to emerge.'

When in 2009 I made research for a paper presented at the Edinburgh University conference *Africa in Scotland, Scotland in Africa* about the African American painter Robert Scott Duncanson (1821-72), I found that as early as around 1850 he made a significant contribution to the visual representation of slavery. Being the grandson of a slave, he was the very first artist of African origin to enter and to make a career in the established white world of fine art. He had to negotiate his career carefully, and that was probably why he manifestly avoided representing black people, restricting himself to the landscape genre.

He only signed one painting about slavery; its subject was taken from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (fig.2).

But he had an intimate collaboration with an African American photographer and Jack-of-all-trades in Cincinnati, James Presley Ball. And Duncanson was most probably the anonymous artist behind a large painted panorama on the history of black slavery, which Ball toured in cities all over the US. Its importance is indicated by the fact that its programme was published. From it we know that the artist who painted the panorama depicted enslaved Africans from being kidnapped in villages in Africa, sold, shipped and exploited at plantations and, if lucky enough to escape, hunted all the way up to Canada on secret paths, on the way passing Cincinnati.

I argued that Duncanson, who died prematurely of mental illness, was suffering from PTSD caused by racism, fear of the supporters of slavery, who were still strong, and by multiple frustrations experienced as a pathfinder in a field into which no black had ventured before him. If I judged his symptoms correctly, he represents a link between cultural and individual trauma.

8. Quoted from David Remnick's article on Barack Obama's *Dreams from my Father*, 'The story of who he is', Guardian 24.04.2010.

9. See S.P.Reyna, *Art and Mummery. Towards a Social Anthropology of Hypocrisy* at <http://les1.man.ac.uk/sa/MAN99PolAnthPapers/stephen%20reyna.htm>.

Stephen P. Reyna at the Anthropology Department of the University of New Hampshire draws from his experiences as an anthropologist and a contracted aid expert in Niger the conclusion that in both cases 'subordinates service the mighty (...) because the mighty control what the subordinates need to satisfy their desires.' When he himself did not comply with the corrupted interests of his superiors, he was fired by the aid organisation. He looks at aid bureaucracy and anthropologists free from all illusions.

About Malinowski he notes that he undoubtedly serviced imperialist interests and once, in a slip of the tongue, declared that he was engaged in 'telling South Africa how to take the Natives' land away according to their Customs'. Another good service to colonialism, that Dr. Reyna came across, was for anthropologists in the field to conceal acts of cruelty that they had witnessed. The silence surrounding colonial cruelty in Africa partly rests on the conscience of anthropologists, and this also applies to the role of the majority of missionaries. The unreported incident, about which Dr.Reyna was told by Africans, was how a local chief, who had been reluctant to meet colonial demands of organising labour against people's will, had been killed by the colonial authorities by having a stick of dynamite thrust up his anus. A similar collective memory is represented in a linocut from 1971 by the Namibian artist John Ndevasia Muafangejo (fig.1), whose traumatised art I reported in my essay 'Konst fran Soder om Sahara'. As the text that is inscribed in the image specifies, it shows how armed white people under Lt Tom Macony with a huge knife decapitated 'Mandune the Great Chief ... in Ovamboland. We remember him in our mind'. The linocut, which is rather unique in African art as an explicit testimony to colonial assault, reminds us of how persistent such traumatic memories were: the brutal incident had taken place 'on 6th February 1916'. Everlyn Nicodemus, 'Konst fran Soder om Sahara', op.cit. 26, 29.

As Annie Coombes has documented (*Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, London: Yale University Press, 1994,)the

attitudes of anthropologists and missionaries in Africa reflected many of the thoroughly indoctrinated opinions on Africa back in Britain. In colonial ruthlessness against Africans, one European nation proved to be as bad as the next. How this ultimately led them to close ranks is illustrated by what happened to the *Blue Book*, which documented Germany's attempted genocide in its colony South-West Africa (today Namibia). Building on German archives seized by British and South African troops at the onset of World War I and representing an extraordinary historical source on colonial cruelty, the report was published in 1918 by the British government's publishing office HMSO and presented to Parliament, thus becoming an official parliamentary report (a Blue Book). On order from the same British and South African governments who published it, the *Blue Book* was destroyed eight years later. In Europe in 1926, Germany – on the brink of the National Socialism takeover – was joining The League of Nations and it was thought it should be rehabilitated.

When I wrote the essay 'Carrying the Sun on Our Back' (submitted essay No 4) on the Herero genocide, the *Blue Book* was nowhere referred to. It simply didn't exist. Since then, David Olusoga and Casper W.Erichsen have published the shocking story in their thoroughly researched *The Kaiser's Holocaust. Germany's Forgotten Genocide*, London: Faber & Faber 2010.

10. Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in C.Nelson and L.Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, London: Macmillan 1988.

11. Everlyn Nicodemus, 'Carrying the Sun on Our Backs', in *Andrea Robbins & Max Becher*, Kortrijk, Kanaal Art Foundation Belgium, 1994. Republished as an online monograph with the University of African Art Press, 2008. In 'Decentring Modernism. Art History and Avant-Garde from the Periphery', *The Art Bulletin* Volume XC No 4 2008, note 7, Partha Mitter writes 'Benjamin Buchloh persuaded the Dutch Kanaal Art Foundation to fund Everlyn Nicodemus' account on German colonial venture, "Carrying the Sun on Our Backs". (...) I understand that this powerful critique of Nazi atrocity in Africa by Nicodemus was removed from the catalogue when the show was held in Germany.' For practical reasons, it was the catalogue that German organisers in Hamburg removed from the exhibition.

12. The Maji-Maji uprising in German East Africa has been surrounded by colonial myths of having been driven by primitive superstitions. Research on oral traditions initiated in independent Tanzania has punctured these myths. Among sources I could rely on was Karl-Martin Seeberg, *Der Maji-Maji Krieg gegen die deutsche Kolonialherrenschaft*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag 1989.

Regarding the Herero uprising in German South West Africa I relied upon Henrik Witbooi, *Afrika an den Afrikanern*, Berlin-Bonn: Verlag J.H.W.Dietz Nachf, 1982, and John Swan, 'The Final Solution in South West Africa' in *The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, Vol.3, No 4 1991. Witbooi could according to a German source have been 'an immortal in world history' had he not been born to 'an insignificant African throne'. David Olusoga and C.W.Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, op. cit, 48.

13. Henrik Witbooi, op. cit.

14. Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden. Africa and the Curse of the Nation State*, New York: Times Books 1992, 40.

15. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press 2004, 77-78.

16. Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, op. cit. 47.
17. Ibid, 48.
18. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: Sidney: Pluto Press 1990, 144.
19. Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery. From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, London: Pandora 1994, 119.
20. Quoted from Nicholas J. Carson. *Ethnopsychiatry and Theories of "the African Mind"* medicine.mcgill.ca/mjm/v03n01/crossroadsv3n1.html
21. Homi Bhabha, 'Foreword: Remembering Fanon. Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition' in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London, Sidney: Pluto Press 1990, xiii.
22. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, London: Penguin Books 1985.
23. Homi Bhabha, op. cit. xixiii-xxiv.
24. In his paper *Racism and Culture* presented at The First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris 1956, Fanon wrote: "Racism stares one in the face for it so happens that it belongs in a characteristic whole: that of the shameless exploitation of one group of men by another." The racism against black humans as a historical process would need an investigation corresponding to the one – in many aspects parallel - delivered about anti-Semitism in David Jonah Goldhagen *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. It shows how ancient elements were incorporated in general race theories elaborated around 1850, while later discourses on genetics aggravated the prejudices by adding the notion of race hygiene. Perceived against the background of an in many ways confused discussion on race and racism, Fanon's simple definition of racism as part of humans' exploitation of humans is important.
25. Frantz Fanon, op.cit. 143-144.
26. Ann Kaplan, 'Fanon, Trauma and Cinema' in A.C.Alessandrini. *Frantz Fanon. Critical Perspectives*, London, New York: Routledge 1999, 146-157.
27. Ann Kaplan refers to the passage in *Black Skin, White Masks*, which begins with the exclamation 'Look, a Negro!' and where Fanon in poetic confusion – 'Nausea...' - narrates the psychological effects of the shock of meeting racism and othering in the form of a child frightened by his blackness, 'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!'
- He notes that his "corporal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema (...) I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors (...) and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin'." If this equals a testimony of being traumatised in a psychiatric sense is open to discussion, but it certainly shows that Fanon had a subjectively informed understanding of trauma. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin*, op.cit. 111-112.
28. John Pepper, 'Snap of the Whip/ Crossroads of Shame. Flogging, Photography, and the Representation of Atrocity in the Congo Reform Campaign', *Visual Anthropology Review*, Vol. 24, Issue 1, 2008, 63.
29. Everlyn Nicodemus, 'Carrying the Sun on Our Backs', Catalogue *Andrea Robbins and Max Becher*, Kortrijk, Belgium: The Kanaal Art Foundation 1994, 62.
30. Everlyn Nicodemus, 'The Black Atlantic and the Paradigm Shift to Modern Art in Africa', *Critical Interventions* 3-4 2009, 7-20.

31. Ernst van Alphen, 'Colonialism as Historical Trauma', B. Atkinson and C. Breitz (eds.), *Grey Areas, Representation, Identity and Politics in Contemporary South African Art*, Johannesburg: Chalkham Hill Press 1999, 271.
32. Reproductions in the catalogue of works in Nigeria's National Gallery of Modern Art, Lagos, *Nucleus*, show on pages 63 and 88 realistic paintings rich in figures of the two artists while in the catalogue *Seven Stories about modern art in Africa*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, on pages 54-55 and 60, highly abstract works represent the same artists. It means a deliberate swinging between figurative and abstract that is difficult to imagine in western Modernism.
33. Gerard Sekoto's *The Song of the Pick*, represents a row of chained black South African convicts with raised picks beside a tiny white supervisor. Sekoto painted it in 1946-47, shortly before he left South Africa for Paris.
34. Evelyn Nicodemus, 'Konst från Söder om Sahara', *Konstperspektiv* 3/92, 26.
35. Ibid. 26, 29.
36. See for instance *Africa Explores* page 166. It has been documented that it was through anthropologist Johannes Fabian that Tshibumba found sponsorship for his series of paintings about the fate of Lumumba. www.cafebabel.co.uk/.../painting-congolese-history-tshibumba-kanda-matulu.html
37. *The Inevitable* by Ibrahim El Salahi is a monumental drawing produced as a montage of nine parts. It has sometimes been called an African *Guernica*. See the catalogue *Seven Stories about modern art in Africa*, page 116.
38. Patrick Chabal, *Africa. The Politics of Suffering and Smiling*, op. cit.
39. Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1965, 272.
40. Evelyn Nicodemus, 'The Ethics of the Wound', op. cit. 191-203.
41. Ibid. 199.
42. Ibid. 197.
43. Ibid. 197.
44. Ibid. 198. See John Pepper, 'Animal Bodies, Absent Bodies. Defiguration in Art after Soweto', *Third Text*, Vol. 17, Issue 1, 2000, 71-83. It is when trying to explain the 'crucified chicken' in the *Chicken Series* (fig. 6) that the author refers to the popular rituals of sacrifices.
45. John Pepper, *Art and the End of Apartheid*, Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press 2009, 41.
46. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black. Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, New Haven, London: Yale University Press 1992, 103.
47. Ibid. 40.
48. John Pepper, *Art and the End of Apartheid*, op. cit. 48-50
49. Ibid. See the chapter 'Here comes Mello-Yello. Image, Violence and Play after Soweto', 98-128.

CONCLUSION

I come to the end of these diverse reflections, and as a conclusion I look back beyond what once conditioned the direction of the research that began in 1984. The essay *Carrying the Sun on Our Backs* contains a portrait of the curious and knowledge thirsty 19 year old African woman who in 1973 came from Tanzania to a European country, Sweden. ‘In Europe, I am a warrior and a hunter. I have become accustomed to hunting knowledge in libraries and archives, in newspapers and periodicals, in bookshops and with editors (...). I also remember the dizziness I experienced the first time I stood among the brimming bookshelves in a European library. All that information, all that power!’¹

One booklet found in Swedish bookshops became a philosophical guide, *Antingen – eller* (Either – or) by the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard.² Amongst the abundance of new impressions it showed me how one can find the strength of consistency by giving one’s personality a content and by proceeding consciously. It talks of the importance of an ethical choice regarding how to live.

‘It is a question of the will to will (...) The aesthetical in man is that by virtue of which she is what she is. The ethical is that by virtue of which she becomes what she becomes (...) I choose the absolute, and what is the absolute? It is I myself in my eternal validity.’

What Kierkegaard made clear was that once you have made your choice, there is no return. You have to proceed. This philosophical insight, which influenced Existentialism, was behind my choice to study social anthropology and behind my choice to abandon it as well. A couple of decades later, when in Belgium I faced a new start after having seen the chapter of the research project *Woman in the World* prematurely terminated, I ordered from Sweden a book which in its sensible, matter-of-fact reasoning reminded me of Kierkegaard, *Prologomena. Introduktion till Världshistorien* (Prologomena. Introduction to the History of the World) by Ibn Khaldun.³

Written in 1377 at a desert fort in Sahara by the eminent Arab historian it reminded me of the fact that long before Europe the African continent produced innovative science, philosophy and historiography.⁴ In the catalogue to my first exhibition in Belgium⁵, I quoted his remarks about how Europeans, taking their own white skin for granted, were lead by their prejudices to fabricate myths about the black inhabitants of the South. More than six hundred years ago he discerned the one-eyed white selfishness that in the form of Eurocentrism and imperial cynicism would cause the black trauma. I also quoted what he wrote about the act of expressing ideas as an intellectual act. ‘Everyone can have ideas and be intellectually aware of which ideas he or she prefers or desires. No technique is needed for that. But the combination of words in order to express ideas demands a technique.’⁵

This very simple and factual description of the relation between the white and the black world and of what is implied in designing communication has been a source of inspiration throughout my research. It played a role in the two essays that I want to point to as representing the culmination of my research: the analysis of the role and art of Aina Onabolu in ‘The Black Atlantic and the Paradigm Shift to Modern Art in Africa’⁶ and the close examination of the *Chicken Series* by Ezrom Legae in ‘The Ethics of the Wound’⁷. In both cases trauma as well as a technique are involved.

As the title indicated, my essay on Onabolu aimed at a new approach to the genesis of modern art in Africa as having behind it a tradition of modernisation over more than a hundred years connected to exchanges within the Black Atlantic trade and movements. The return to West Africa of freed black slaves was part of those exchanges. Paul Gilroy argues that the trauma of having been enslaved and having regained the status of free citizens produced a certain progressive spirit.⁸ With former slaves constituting a prominent demographic element in Lagos, this inverted trauma contributed to make the town a culturally progressive milieu, something that has seldom been underlined in the discussion about the genesis of modern art in Africa.

It was here Onabolu initiated the paradigm shift. The technique that he appropriated from Europe was the one his son Dapo Onabolu referred to in an obituary in December 1963 as a science basic for both the production and the reception of a mimetic representation in visual art, which was new for Africa ⁹ (chpt 3, fig.3).

According to John Clark in *Modern Asian Art*¹⁰ academic realism as technique, style and institutional training imported from Europe represented in many Asian countries the marker of the new, of the change from domestic traditions to an art of modernity. Applying this definition to Onabolu's contribution and pointing to the international parallel became one of my strongest arguments for a revision of the role of Onabolu, who too often had been treated as 'old fashioned'.¹¹

I also tried to bring new insights into the political and cultural background to Onabolu's choice of vocation, especially to his decision - in a protest against European racial prejudices about Africans as unable to produce fine art - to compete with European artists on their terms. The cultural background was represented by the intellectual influence from the Pan-African pioneer Edward Wilmot Blyden from the Caribbean, who strongly argued about equality between Africans and Europeans. The political background was connected to what happened to Onabolu's native town Ijebu-Ode¹². Researching it was an insightful experience that resembled the one told by Basil Davison of how he first got a glimpse of history in Africa, somewhere in Nigeria during the Second World War.¹³

Davidson writes: 'There came to me through that distance the outline of a presence, of a wall both tall and long, a city wall. Very big was the wall (...) It was built of mud and timber, and it went right round a city lost in this African nowhere'.¹⁴ When he learned that the town was several centuries old, he grasped for the first time that Africa must have a history. The unknown city turned out to be Kano in northern Nigeria, but his description could as well have been a representation of Ijebu-Ode and its city wall, which, I learned, was big enough to give rise to myths about the Queen of Sheba, and which surrounded a Yoruba town with an equally impressive history of many centuries. Behind the walls of Ijebu-Ode, further research indicated, lived, when Aina Onabolu

was born there, a highly self-confident people who seemed to be well informed about the political situation in the region and who did not allow any white foreigners inside the city wall, be it traders or missionaries. Hints in the archives indicated that the missionary resentment might have been part of the reason why the British in 1892 decided to launch a punitive attack on Ijebu-Ode, aiming at setting an example for the region.

Despite the fact that the defenders of Ijebu-Ode had the strength of the wall and of modern weaponry, British machine guns and flexible military tactics prevailed and they were defeated. Further hints in the archives indicate conversions to Christianity and Islam following the humiliating catastrophe, something that may be interpreted both as a sign of a collective trauma, of a loss of belief in the traditional deities and also as a sign of developing a strategy to regain a position of strength by appropriating basic cultural elements from the victors, their religions. With missionaries allowed in came more schools and education. And simultaneously the gradual disappearance of places of worship and of cult objects, which had been carrying the pre-colonial traditions of visual production, produced a cultural vacuum.

Was the field open for thinking the possibility of a new kind of visual art, when Onabolu, some years after the catastrophe and still in school, decided to dedicate himself to competing with white artists in what they called fine arts? At the present to answer this question requires a balancing act between interpreting frail archival sources and speculative reasoning. But it would also require a focused research carried out at the location, which might bring up documented facts confirming that a collective trauma was partly the motor of Onabolu's decision and behind the first emergence of a new kind of art production. But this falls outside my reach.

The aim of my research has been to contribute to a modern African art historiography taking into account both conditions and strength of modern African art by inscribing among the considerations a consciousness of the role of the black cultural trauma, a factor that mainly has been overlooked in the discussion. It is not an issue regarding which you, based on existing sources, can point to obvious causes and effects or determined artists' responses. If I am right in my assumption of a historical trauma in

the case of Onobolu, then the two essays I am considering point to two different responses: protest, revolt and a life of counter activity in the first case, where trauma is not an obvious component of the artistic production, and in the case of Ezrom Legae an artistic identification with and working through trauma.

If the research on Onobolu opened wider perspectives, that on Ezrom Legae represents rather a close up. In the essay 'The Ethics of the Wound' I deliberately chose to focus on one limited case study, that of his famous *Chicken Series*, in an attempt to specify in more detail my notion of how post-traumatic stress disorder may influence visual production and to exemplify the kind of analysis I have developed from that notion.

Taking up the issue of the collective trauma caused by apartheid in South Africa behind Legae's individual trauma occasioned its definition as part of a wider black African trauma caused by the awareness of the history of slavery and colonialism, a traumatic consciousness more or less always present. I made a distinction between a trauma historically inflicted on Africans as victims and a European trauma, which in the case of artists like Wols and Fautrier could be said also to be linked to a perpetrators' trauma, a disturbing consciousness in Europe about who inflicted horrors like the World Wars and the Holocaust. A general conclusion is that if modern African art historically can be said to be connected to colonialism, and if European modernism drew inspiration from Africa in the same colonial context, one should never forget the difference between the victimized and the perpetrating side of this double relation.

The two essays commented upon here represented together a culmination in twenty-five years of research. Practicing as a visual artist has played a vital role in it. The role of artistic practice in the project *Woman in the World* centres on dialogue between speech and images, which by repeated exchanges carries forward an investigation and an open discourse towards enriched experiences with innovative aspects both on a theoretical and a practical level. The art works connected to *Ethics of the Wound* fall within two categories, those produced before my trauma studies, e.g. the series *The Object* and *The Wedding*, and those, from the series *Birth Mask* and on, which are part of an experimentation through which I develop my notion of trauma.

Exactly what within the latter category represents instructions from the artistic work that has been elaborated in theoretical work and what may have functioned as guidance in the opposite direction will have to be a matter of future analyses.

Inspiration from experienced trauma is nothing new. Living and working as an African born modern visual artist and writer in the European diaspora has in several ways determined the trajectory of my research. In Europe I had a double burden saddled upon me, the insight into the full extent of a painful black African history of slavery and colonialism and the consciousness of European and western racial prejudices, neither of which were issues in my childhood and youth in Africa. Consequently an individual and a cultural trauma together with an intellectual thirst for knowledge combined from the beginning to motor the research. This driving curiosity was intimately linked to my creative urge as a visual artist.

When it comes to my submitted artistic practices, including visual production in different media as well as organising exhibitions and symposia, representing around a third of the submitted published work, what distinguishes it from the bulk of my production as a visual artist is that it in a more specific way was related to trauma and entered into dialogue with focused theoretical discourses on trauma and testimony, acted out as in *Woman in the World* and developed in writings as in *The Ethics of the Wound*.

My artistic production has seldom entered the private gallery and collector circuits. In most cases it has been exhibited in non-commercial and relatively marginal contexts, which is reflected in how it has been documented and also in a relatively sparse critical evaluation of my artwork. The latter has mainly appeared in exhibition catalogues and in publications with a distinctive image like *Third Text*.

Indian critical voices are prominent, largely from the many reviews in Calcutta in 1986 but also in writings by the Indian Oxford art historian Partha Mitter.¹⁵ Among critically analytical texts the following are to be mentioned: Jean Fisher, *Everlyn Nicodemus: Between Silence and Laughter* and extensive references in her text *Diaspora, Trauma*

and the Poetics of Remembrance; Kevin Power, *Everlyn Nicodemus*; Jon Thompson, *Everlyn Nicodemus: In the Mirror of the Eye*; and Janice Cheddie, *Listening to Trauma in the Art of Everlyn Nicodemus*.¹⁶

It would perhaps have been an obvious choice to include studies of black diaspora art in Europe as well as in the United States and the Caribbean. I have followed the ongoing debate surrounding these fields, and it has in many ways informed my research. But I early on found that while the diaspora chapters were comparatively well researched, much remained to be done concerning modern art in the African continent. That was where I in 1992 decided to attempt a scholarly contribution.

In that perspective, the research that I have carried out during the years 1984-2009, which at first sight may seem rather heterogeneous, emerges as a trajectory of interlocking strands. At one point it turned from a more subjective experiment in communication to an art historical inquiry. At another point it shifted towards studying psychiatric and cultural research on psychological trauma in order to acquire new instruments for deeper analyses. Through all these movements the starting-point and the ultimate aim have remained principally constant, to contribute knowledge, ideas and critical considerations to a history of modern African art in the making,

It is difficult to assess what impact my research may have had. It has been noted that my repeated call for the application of a strictly art historical discipline on theorising and writing about as well as on organising exhibitions of modern African art have played a role in motivating the first art historically conceived exhibition, *Seven Stories about modern art in Africa* at Whitechapel Art Gallery in London 1995.¹⁷ was commissioned to write an art historical text for its catalogue.¹⁷ Twelve years later I was invited by Professor Sylvester Ogbechie to give a key note paper at an international conference on modern African art historiography at the University of California Santa Barbara. The organisers published the abstract of my paper as a manifesto on the Internet, *An Art History Africa Badly Needs*, a sign that my work was perceived as in some general sense serving as a guide.¹⁸

Among my contributions to research on modern African art it is worth mentioning the contextualisation of the work of Aina Onabolu as a paradigm shift. I proposed the notion in an essay in 1995-96, 'Art and Art from Africa. The Two Sides of the Gap'.¹⁹ Most literature on African art has been tardy to use the notion or even to comment upon it as a historical tool to interpret the transition from a pre-modern to a modern art system, something that may have to do with the extraordinariness of a thinking in terms of art systems. The term is not the important thing as much as an understanding of the nature and the scope of the change it attempts to indicate. Partha Mitter, with whom I have discussed my ideas of a paradigm shift, does not hesitate to talk of a 'paradigm change' as an 'explanatory tool for understanding the generation of social and cultural meaning within the context of colonial art'. Reflecting upon the ideas of Thomas Kuhn, the scholar who coined the term in the history of sciences, he considers it to provide a convincing argument for change through adoption.³⁰

When research is carried out in a scholarly dialogue with parallel researches, it is fairly easy to assess where arguments differ and also where the findings or interpretations in one research prevail to the degree of having an effect on the course of other researches. Independent research outside the pattern of academic disputation can sometimes exert a decisive influence, but one that it is much more difficult to pin down. That kind of hesitance applies to my research and to what influence it may have had. Art historical writing on modern African art is still in a preparatory stage.

With rather few examples of direct critical responses and references in the literature to point to, should I consider as indications of a potential influence the number and character of re-publications and reprints of specific texts? My essay 'Art and Art from Africa' was republished in Brazil²¹, and the essay 'Inside.Outside' was translated into Euskara (Basque language) and Spanish and published in the Arteleku bulletin *Zehar No 32, 1996*²² to mention some examples.

The essay 'Bourdieu out of Europe?' offers a specific case. It was published in *Third Text* No 30 in 1995, and could in that context be characterised as a review elaborated into a methodological discussion of African art historiography, taking Pierre Bourdieu's

ideas into a new area.²³ As a review it analysed and commented upon Bourdieu's theory of the field of visual art in *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) and *Regles de l'art. Genese et structure du champs litteraire* (1992)²⁴, and in its African part it discussed among other things Koju Fosu, *20th Century Art of Africa* (1986).²⁵ What contributed to a positive reception was the circumstance that the writing of the essay had been combined with a correspondence with Bourdieu himself.²⁶

When the essay in 1999 was included in the anthology O.Enwezor and O.Oguibe (eds), *Reading the Contemporary African Art from Theory to Market Place*²⁷, the aim of which was indicated as 'laying a groundwork for the methodology of an alternative art history', the editors presented my essay, in between texts by Anthony Appiah, V.Y.Mudimbe, Sidney Kasfir and Chika Okeke, in the following way: 'Returning to the question of the marginalisation of modern African artists (...) Evelyn Nicodemus considers the applicability of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production as a method of analysis free from the disadvantages of Western art historiography.'

The essay kept its identity as one text among innumerable texts reflecting and commenting on Bourdieu's theory, method and practice when it, also in 1999, was included as one among around 125 titles in the four-volume reference collection *Pierre Bourdieu*, edited by Professor Derek Robbins for Sage Publications.

A fourth variant of categorising the essay occurred when *Third Text* in 2009 reprinted it in its Second Edition of *Third Text Africa*.²⁸ Its first special issue on Africa had been published in 1993, carrying among other texts my essay 'Meeting Carl Einstein'. The new African issue had the subtitle *re/framed*, and the editor Mario Pissarra specified the notion of framing by pointing to 'debates between privileging the work as a purportedly autonomous entity and imposing the broader context as a deterministic force.'

Like a work of art, a text, once it is published, has its own trajectory. Framing is part of the intellectual and academic work of observing and commenting upon written projectiles flying around. What I finally consider to be a key contribution in the Bourdieu essay is a challenge. It concluded that the theoretical work to be done and the

critical discourses to develop represent a work that cannot be carried out as an internal African affair, neither can it simply mean taking over ready-made and field specific discourses from the West.

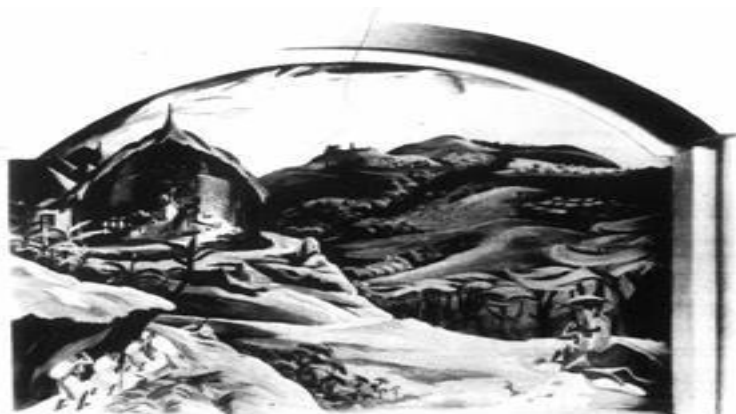


Fig.1, Elimo Njau, *Nativity*, tempera, 1956, mural in the Church of the Martyrs, Fort Hall, Kenya. While a pre-colonial work of art “produced for practical ritual use and building on the belief in magic, functions through the symbolic presence of the god or of divine forces, which are contained and represented in the forms, (t)he construction of the illusion of a three-dimensional space (...) abolishes the magical sense of presence and replaces it with an illusion of looking into a scene or a vision.” Submitted Essay Nr 6,11.

Endnotes

1. Everlyn Nicodemus, ‘Carrying the Sun on Our Backs’, in Kanaal Art Foundation catalogue *Andrea Robbins & Max Becher*, Kortrijk, Belgium, 1994, 62. Republished as an online monograph with the University of African Art Press, 2008.
2. Soren Kierkegaard, *Antingen – eller* (1843), Stockholm: Wahlstrom & Widstrand 1964, 58, 60, 79-80. Quotations translated from Swedish by Kristian Romare.
3. Ibn Khaldun, *Prolegomena, Introduktion till Varldshistorien, (Al-Muqaddima)*, Lund: Alhambra, 1989.
4. Jean Fisher, writing about my mini installation works *Quoting Ibn Khaldun I* and *II* in the text ‘Everlyn Nicodemus: Between Silence and Laughter’ in the catalogue Everlyn Nicodemus *Displacements*, Sala de Exposiciones de la Universidad de Alicante 1997 (no pagination), notes that ‘[i]n both works a short quotation from the 14th century philosopher Ibn Khaldun (an important influence in the development of the artist’s thought) referring specifically to writing and knowledge is inscribed on the back.’ See also Jim al-Khalili, *Pathfinders: The Golden Age of Arabic Science*, London: Allen Lane 2010.
5. Everlyn Nicodemus, *Vessels of Silence*, exhibition catalogue, Art Foundation Kanaal and Benedengalerij, Kortrijk, Belgium 1992, 1.
6. Everlyn Nicodemus, ‘The Black Atlantic and the Paradigm Shift to Modern Art in Africa’, *Critical Interventions. Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture*, no 3-4, 2009. Santa Barbara: Aachron, 7-20.
7. Everlyn Nicodemus, ‘The Ethics of the Wound’, Van den Braembussche et al (eds), *Art and World Views: Towards an intercultural aesthetics*, Springer Science 2008, 191-203.

8. Evelyn Nicodemus, 'The Black Atlantic and the Paradigm Shift to Modern Art in Africa', op. cit.17.
9. Dapo Onabolu, 'Aina Onabolu', *Nigeria Magazine* 79, December 1963, 295-298.
10. John Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 1998.
11. Whatever the reasons for an attitude of neglect vis-à-vis Onabolu, I could follow its manifestations from Ulli Beier, *Contemporary Art in Africa*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 1998, and Marshall W.Mount, *African Art: The years since 1920*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1973, both omitting to name Onabolu. Without naming Evelyn Nicodemus but indirectly hinting at my strong advocacy of Onabolu's pioneering role, Olu Oguibe called it 'increasingly fashionable to begin the history of "modern" or so-called contemporary art in Africa from the Nigerian painter Aina Onabolu', *Third Text* no 12.
12. Ijebu-Ode, the capital of the Yoruba kingdom of Ijebu in south-western Nigeria, 110 km north-east of Lagos, dominated for centuries the trade between the Lagos area and the Yoruba hinterland, especially Ibadan. When it closed the trade routes between Lagos and Ibadan, this provoked the British punitive assault on the town in 1892.
13. Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden. Africa and the Curse of the Nation State*, New York: Random House 1993.
14. Ibid. 6-7.
15. The exhibition in Calcutta occasioned a dozen reviews and commentaries in the press. Dipankar Roy's review 'A woman's revolution through paintings and verse' in *Evening Brief* November 11 1986 began: 'Evelyn Nicodemus, or the woman with the spear as she likes to be known challenges the distorted conditions and injustice of present-day life through her paintings and verse.' See also Partha Mitter's appreciative reference in 'Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery', *The Art Bulletin* Volume XC No 4, 2008, where he argues about the negligence of non-Western modernism in Western art history and is given space in the issue to get and to comment upon responses to his arguments. Discussing Eurocentric fallacies in the prominent American survey *art since 1900* he mentions among artists he misses in it such as Wifredo Lam, Jamini Roy and Tarsila do Amaral 'more recently Evelyn Nicodemus's profoundly moving representations of global genocide'.
16. Jean Fisher, 'Evelyn Nicodemus: Between Silence and Laughter' in the catalogue *Displacements*, Sala de Exposiciones de la Universidad de Alicante 1997, reprinted in *Third Text* no 40 autumn 1997 and in Jean Fisher, *Vampire in the Text, Narratives of Contemporary Art*, London: Iniva 2003; Jean Fisher, 'Diaspora, Trauma and the Poetics of Remembrance' in K. Mercer (ed.), *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*, London: Iniva 2008; Kevin Power, 'Evelyn Nicodemus' in the catalogue *Displacements*, Sala de Exposiciones de la Universidad de Alicante 1997, republished in *Microfisuras 1*, San Sebastian, Spain 1997; Jon Thompson, 'Evelyn Nicodemus: In the Mirror of the Eye' in catalogue of the exhibition *Evelyn Nicodemus* at Galerie Even-aarde, Gent 2000; and Janice Cheddie, 'Listening to Trauma in the Art of Evelyn Nicodemus', *Third Text* No 84, Volume 21, Issue 1, January 2007.
17. In 'Seven Stories about modern art in Africa', *Art Forum* January 1996, Jean Fisher wrote: "'Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa" (...) was the first exhibition to attempt to provide a historical context for African Modernism. This was largely due to the writings of artist Evelyn Nicodemus, originally from Tanzania, who has long criticized the way that certain Western collectors present folkloric

African cultural products as the “African” art, thus reinforcing the West’s perception of that continent’s culture as exotic and intellectually backward.’

18. The art historical survey of African Modernism *Inside.Outside* presupposed, I argued, field research in Nigeria and South Africa. This research was consequently funded by Iniva as a commission to collect materials for its archives.

19. The Mbafeno Foundation Conference *Interrogating African Modernity* took place at the University of California Santa Barbara May 4–5 2007. Sylvester Ogbechie wrote about the papers presented that they ‘cover a wide range of analyses and all call for drastic revision of established dogma in African art history. Evelyn Nicodemus leads the charge by arguing that modern African artists need a professional and seriously analytical art history as a framework for their practice but because institutions and infrastructures still are underdeveloped and resources are lacking in most African countries, efforts to develop a well researched and historical scholarship have to be made in a wider context, involving scholars in Africa, in the Diaspora and in other parts of the world, including the West.’

20. Evelyn Nicodemus, ‘Art and Art from Africa. The Two Sides of the Gap’, *Third Text* no 33, 1995–96.

21. Partha Mitter, ‘Decentering Modernism: art history and avant-garde art from the periphery’, *The Art Bulletin* Volume XC No 4, 2008.

22. *Item* No 5, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2002.

23. Evelyn Nicodemus, ‘Barnealde. Kanpoalde. Arte afrikar modernoaren, perspektiba globala’, *Zehar*, boletin de Arteleku 32, 1996.

24. Evelyn Nicodemus, ‘Bourdieu out of Europe?’, *Third Text* no 30, 1995, 3–12.

25. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, Cambridge; Polity Press 1993, and *Les regles de l’art. Genese et structure du champ litteraire*, Paris: Seuil 1992.

26. Koju Fosu, *20th Century Art of Africa*, Zaria: Gaskiya 1986.

27. In the correspondence I had with Professor Bourdieu he approved after some remarks my summary of his theory of the field of modern art production. He agreed to let me follow up the discussion with an interview, but bad health intervened.

28. *Africa Special Issue* 1993, and Chika Okeke omitted the artist from his selection for the exhibition *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London 1995. He revised his stance in the essay ‘Modern African Art’ eight years later in O. Enwezor (ed.), *The Short Century, Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945–1994*, Munich: Prestel Verlag 2003, while Oguibe did a turnaround in 2002 in an essay in which, without mentioning any source, he appropriated views and terms corresponding to those in my research. Olu Oguibe, ‘Appropriation as Nationalism in Modern African Art’, *Third Text* no 60, 2002.

29. Evelyn Nicodemus, ‘Bourdieu out of Europe?’, O.Enwezor and O.Oguibe (eds), *Reading the Contemporary. African Art from Theory to Market place*, London: Iniva, and MIT 1999.

30. Evelyn Nicodemus, ‘Bourdieu out of Europe?’, *Third Text Africa re/framed*, Vol 1 no 2 2009.

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